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ABSTRACT

This guide, designed for teachers and other workers in adult basic education, includes a variety of articles about teaching; counseling, and advocacy approaches; curriculum planning and evaluation, assessment; and program design based on personal experience. All focus on critical thinking as a teaching and learning skill. Article topics include: (1) an overview of the Critical Thinking Project from which the publication emerged; (2) theory of critical thinking as it underlies practice; (3) descriptions of specific curriculum projects, including curricula on beauty, weight, and nutrition, students' real life dramas, oral history and community art, immigration, and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) awareness; (4) the process of analyzing and solving problems; and (5) assessing Spanish literacy. Also included are interviews with a teacher and a student in a program for women, rooted in the black community, that examine critical thinking as an educational priority and how critical thinking is interpreted, taught, learned, and practiced. (Author/MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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Probing to Know

A Teachers' Guide to Exploring Critical Thinking and Adult Literacy

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PROBING TO KNOW

A Teachers' Guide to Exploring
Critical Thinking and Adult Literacy

Barbara E. Neumann, Editor

Contributors:

Cathy Anderson
Sarah Boyer
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Rosario Gomez-Sanford
Marie Thompson
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"But no matter whether my probings made me happier or sadder, I kept on probing to know."

Zora Neale Hurston,
Dust Tracks on a Road

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Using This Book

This book is for teachers and other workers in adult basic education. Its emphasis is on the process of learning and teaching about a social, political world through the experience of reading and writing. Although much of the material presented here relates directly to classroom practice, we have chosen to draw explicit connections among the classrooms we inhabit and create and our participation in other communities. We believe these connections are necessary because the consciousness which shapes our learning is formed not only from our "school identity"--whether that be the identity of student, teacher, counselor, administrator, or tutor--but from other parts of our lives as well. So you will find here, for example, curriculum plans and class projects that grew out of our--and our students'--experiences as Black, Latina, or working class women; as parents; as immigrants. By openly acknowledging the ways in which who we are bears upon what and how we learn, and hence teach, we make possible the beginnings of dialogue, which is perhaps our most important resource for critical thinking.

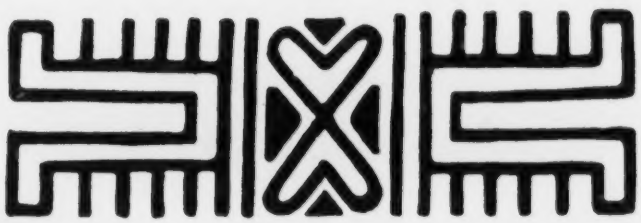
This book does not speak to the wishes of teachers who are looking for universally applicable recipes or techniques, nor to those who are in search of a curriculum package or blueprint for teaching critical thinking. We are writing here of our own specific experiences and discoveries. We hope that these will be a stimulus to further study and questioning. The curricula which we developed, tried, and critiqued are written about in some detail so that others can extract what might be useful to them and also build upon our efforts.

Thus, this guide is not a "how-to manual" in the traditional sense, although it contains practical information about teaching, counseling and advocacy approaches; curriculum planning and evaluation; assessment; and program design. The section called "Frameworks" deals with theory as it underlies practice. Its purpose is not to outline academic formulations or impose labels on our practice, but rather to help teachers and students become more aware of the beliefs which guide our actions and our education--so that we can develop our capacity for conscious choice and change. This handbook reflects our attempt to develop theory

as well as practice, but we have chosen to highlight concrete examples of theory and practice interacting rather than to analyze theory as pure abstraction.

The two interviews which conclude the book are especially important in this regard. They are expressions of a teacher's and a student's views of critical thinking as daily struggle, discovery, and action, both in and out of the classroom. In essence, they summarize the work of this project.

The chapters in this book can be read in any order, and you don't have to read everything. You can borrow bits and pieces of the curriculum offerings; adapt our staff development process to different situations; ponder questions that are raised here; challenge our various individual and group perspectives. In short, we hope you find the work that is documented here both useful and thought-provoking.



An Overview of the Critical Thinking Project

Background: Questions Out of Chaos

Over the past few years, "critical thinking" has surfaced as a fashionable trend in adult literacy education.

Consultants sell their definitions of the concept, while expensive computer programs and workbook series guarantee easy progress on the critical thinking fast track. Critical Thinking terminology has been used to describe the learning benefits of everything from GED exams to rap groups. Sometimes critical thinking is a necessary route to radical social action, but all too often the supposed "critical" element is politically narrow and prescriptive rather than genuinely critical and creative. The phrase "critical thinking" definitely signals many meanings.

Many of the published materials designed to assist adult educators in teaching critical thinking focus on imparting minutely delineated sequential and hierarchical skills, a packaged "method" of critical thinking. Ironically, such standardized approaches offer teachers little inspiration for looking at their own work in a fresh or inventive way. Furthermore, in a political climate which stresses "employability" as the most highly valued--or, in some cases, only legitimate--educational outcome, basic literacy teachers are often handed a mandate burdened with contradictions: they are to "move" students through their programs as fast as possible; "give" them the speaking, reading and writing skills they need to perform certain job related tasks (no more, no less); and also teach them to think critically--so they can make effective decisions on the job--but not so critically that they will seriously challenge the status quo, at work or elsewhere.

Classroom conditions may similarly work against teachers' efforts to bring an agenda of critical inquiry to their literacy work. Overly large or totally individualized

classes, irregular student participation, and grouping of students according to arbitrary skill levels may pose barriers to the kind of open and sustained dialogue that supports critical thinking. These problems are compounded when teachers are isolated from their colleagues, have little or no paid staff development time, and lack access to needed material resources--all common scenarios for adult educators.

Literacy teachers aren't necessarily better able than their adult students to think critically, yet that assumption is implicit in much of the critical thinking rhetoric and literature. Condescending attitudes are fed by the belief that literacy per se is an index of a person's ability to think creatively and critically. A closely associated belief is that inadequate thinking skills (usually translated as "problem-solving" ability) are the source of poor and working class people's troubles. In this conservative ideological scheme, problems are personally rather than socially constructed. The message is that individuals should be able to solve their problems (of unemployment, inferior housing and health care, and so forth) by "learning how to think." It should not be surprising that many of the commercially produced problem-solving exercises and activities aimed at ABE and ESL students reinforce this notion. They are often simplistically framed and bear little resemblance to the actual problems people face. "Thinking critically" then comes to mean "thinking correctly," according to a supplied formula.

Teachers who wish to develop in themselves and with their students a perspective of critical teaching and critical learning are likely to find that they are immersed in a tangle of questions. However many definitions might be floating around, what do we mean by critical thinking? How does critical thinking differ in various contexts? What are the connectors among critical thinking, reading, and writing? How culture-bound are our views of critical thinking? Does critical thinking necessarily lead to action? How do we define action? What is suggested by the language we use to describe and discuss critical thinking? What are our intentions and responsibilities as teachers?

It was with all of these dilemmas, conflicts, and considerations as a backdrop that the Critical Thinking Project came into being.

Determining a Purpose

Neither learning nor teaching is a mechanical process. The Critical Thinking Project grew out of the participant teachers' conviction that "learning to read is a political act"--and that teaching reading is a political act as well. The decision to learn to read and write is a decision to change the nature of one's social relationships, and a decision to assert control over one's own life in a new way. To try to remove literacy from its political context is to trivialize and undermine the essential movement toward change that motivates learning.

The Critical Thinking Project represents a group of adult educators' attempts to grapple with the activist qualities of our work. Our point of departure: "The learning process is something you can incite, literally incite... Then, just possibly, hopefully, it goes home, or on."* We wanted to understand better the limits and possibilities of a "critical pedagogy," to make discoveries which could come only from looking closely, with others, at our day-to-day teaching practice. Through this effort our goal is to stimulate and support adults' thinking, as they learn to read and write.

---

* Audre Lorde, Sister Outsider, p. 98.

Our Workgroup Process

Over a period of a year, a core group of seven teachers worked on the Critical Thinking Project. All women, we were a diverse group in terms of race, culture, age, and class background. We worked as ABE or ESL teachers in a variety of community based education settings. In many ways, we mirrored the differences that could be found among our students and our programs.

During the first six months we met as regularly and frequently as our schedules would allow, usually bi-weekly. During that time we examined our assumptions about education --from the self-identified perspective of being both students and teachers, as well as from the vantage point of theory. We described what happened in our classes and helped each other think of ways to apply what we learned in a given situation to our ongoing practice. We spent the latter part of the year documenting the curricula and teaching approaches we had tried, getting feedback from one another, and continuing to revise and build upon our earlier work.

Early on, we identified several premises which were important in guiding and focusing our work. These were the starting points we agreed upon:

Critical thinking must be looked at through the lens of culture.

Cultural values form our beliefs about thinking. Inevitably, as teachers, we are the transmitters of culture. To ignore the cultural roots of our "thinking about thinking" is to engage in a kind of dogmatism, or cultural chauvinism.

A shared commitment in our group was to look at critical thinking as a manifestation of culture, but also as an act of culture-making. We defined and redefined critical thinking in relation to the varied cultures and communities of our experience. And the curricula we developed for our classes grew out of a conscious intent to respect cultural context.

Beginning to read does not mean beginning to think.

We start from a recognition that adults who are learning to read have been thinking all their lives. Our challenge as literacy teachers is to make written language an accessible tool for communicating complex thought. The point we keep constantly in mind while teaching is this: use language to clarify, not bury, ideas.

We can only teach what we ourselves practice.

For teachers to concentrate only on strategies for teaching, fostering, and supporting the development of critical thinking in <u>others</u> is to set up a false dichotomy between teachers and students. Ideally, in our classes, developing critical thinking is a collaborative process that includes everybody.

We as teachers need to look critically not only at our goals and practice but also at the nature of our work and our working conditions. We made it a priority of this project to draw connections between our classrooms and the larger structures surrounding them.

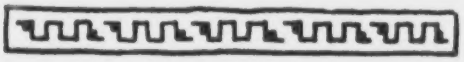
The Critical Thinking Project was funded through a teacher training grant, and we were especially concerned that other teachers be able to learn from the process we followed. We chose to use methods of self-education, dialogue, and networking rather than a traditional model of training which, while it may include some participatory elements, essentially rests on a "banking" concept of education -- it assumes a passive role for the teacher participants. We wanted to draw upon our diverse collective experience and also learn from the work of other educators. Our agenda for self-education included several aspects:

* Studying some concrete examples of critical pedagogy developed outside of our group.

* Learning some new skills which could be incorporated in our ongoing work.

* Looking in greater depth at recurring themes we've encountered in doing community based adult education; these included: ways to develop literacy through exploration of social issues; the impact of working conditions on classroom structure and student participation; counseling and teaching as integrated and complementary forms of critical pedagogy; and curriculum planning as critical process.

* Reflecting upon and refining our own teaching practice.



We created a structure for the first phase of the project which alternated workshop sessions focused on specific topics with group discussions of our work related to the topics. After some talk and planning, a program was implemented around these specific interests:

Teaching About Apartheid

We began our workshop/discussion series with a forum on "teaching about apartheid." This was an important beginning for a number of reasons. First, several teachers in our group had discussed apartheid in their classes at various times but not within the framework of a developed curriculum. We were interested in learning what other teachers had done in the way of really studying the history and politics of apartheid with ABE students. Also, many of us were anxious to learn more about drawing connections between local events, personal experience, and larger political systems. Often in our teaching we had used problem-posing as a way to encourage critical analysis of social conditions which affect daily life in our families, communities, and workplaces. We felt, however, a tendency to focus on "achievable solutions" --sometimes at the expense of pursuing a more in-depth, larger-world-view analysis of the problem. The issue of apartheid is one which links personal experience (subjection to both subtle and overt racism, enacted by individuals and institutions) and governmental policies in a global context. In addition, we were interested in learning more about the possibilities for connecting literacy, critical thinking, and social change.

Two teachers were invited to present case studies of basic literacy classes addressing the issue of apartheid. In the same session, Themba Vilikazi, a local South African anti-apartheid activist, described the educational process he uses in working with school and community groups. Also available for us to analyze was a curriculum on apartheid designed by Helen Jones for use with adult literacy participants.

The forum set the stage for the kind of teacher sharing we would attempt during the rest of the project. It was especially helpful for us to look closely at examples provided by other teachers of what we also were trying to do: examine a theme, over time, in a way that nurtured critical analysis and combined classroom and community education. The month-long AIDS Awareness Project later developed by teachers at Mujeres Unidas (described in detail in the curriculum section) used this approach to address a politically and emotionally charged issue of great concern to the Latino community. In this instance, literacy instruction and community education were merged, with student participants investigating an issue, taking leadership as community educators, and working on their reading and writing skills throughout the process.

Language Learning And Literacy: Teaching Issues For Educators Working With Bilingual, Bicultural Adults

Important issues related to language and culture arise constantly in all our classrooms. Too often, these issues are perceived as being in the province of "ESL," and a false but rigid distinction between ABE and ESL is reinforced. We need to recognize that a "monolingual" environment may nonetheless be (and usually is) multicultural. And whatever language(s) we speak, the ways we use language are inevitably tied to culture.

As educators, we were interested in pursuing some of our questions about language and culture in an open-ended way, outside the familiar framework of "how to teach...." We wanted to freely investigate and challenge our assumptions about language and culture in a format that could be transported to our classes.

In a workshop presentation, we started with familiar events (childhood games), and we constructed together a model for examining our concepts and experiences of language and culture. We looked at social structures and practices at many levels, from family relationships to the dynamics of classrooms, to the operation of institutions and whole societies. Finally, we discussed implications of this analysis for our day to day work in various communities.

Video Production As A Teaching and Learning Tool

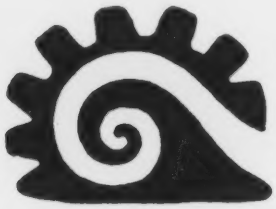
All of us were intrigued with the possibilities of using video technology in our classrooms, but felt we lacked the knowledge and skill required to implement even a simple project involving video. We decided that a series of training sessions on video use in classrooms would help us accomplish several goals: we would learn some new and valuable technical skills; we would put ourselves in the role of learner and thus learn more about the situation usually occupied by our students; and we would have the experience of planning, carrying out, and analyzing a process that included unfamiliar tasks and terminology.

So our group participated in a hands-on workshop series for "complete beginners" during which we developed a short video piece. The focus throughout was on extrapolating our learning experience to classroom teaching practice. We identified ways to use video production to encourage critical thinking, and gathered resources for further development.

Following the video workshops, two teachers pursued further training and went on to develop more sophisticated projects using their new skills as videographers. Lill Cooper's curriculum on Harriet Tubman is an example of an oral history project which includes video as a tool for developing critical thinking.

After three and a half months of intense workshops and discussions which involved collaboration with outside presenters our process evolved into a pattern of working within our classrooms and programs, sharing our work in project meetings, evaluating it, and making changes. An important element in our process was the decision to use our group meetings to address programmatic issues which affect our teaching but which are generally viewed as outside the scope of "curriculum development" or "teacher training." We took on such problems as workplace hierarchies, unanticipated funding cuts, structural changes and the imposition of power. By bringing to the group some of the organizational problems we confronted we were able to develop much more effective strategies than we could have if we had tried to do our problem-solving in isolation. We were also developing with each other a community of trust and support.

We continued to learn from each other. We tried constantly to enlarge our experience, so as to deepen our understanding of the social issues around which much of our teaching is organized. We used each other as resources, and worked at developing broader community connections. This flexible and simple approach to critical thinking allowed us to work through complex issues without becoming mired in rhetoric, and made clearer to us the connections between teaching and learning.



Frameworks

Drawn from Experience: Working Toward a Teaching Definition of Critical Thinking

Critical Thinking is not a catalogue of skills. Critical thinking is not formal logic, necessarily or only. Critical thinking is not political correctness. Critical thinking is not apolitical. Critical thinking is not a developmental stage. Critical thinking is not North American or European. Critical thinking is not masculine. Critical thinking is not easy.

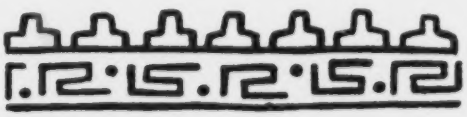
Critical thinking is thinking. Critical thinking is learning something and thinking more about it. Critical thinking is a weaving of analysis and dreaming. Critical thinking is a process. Critical thinking is asking questions. Critical thinking is probing deeper. Critical thinking is leaving room for more thoughts and more questions.

Critical thinking is hard to define, easier to recognize. In familiar situations like these, critical thinking is clearly happening:

> A class discussion starts with one person's challenge of a racist remark, and leads to an exploration of history, politics, language, feelings; words and maps analyzed; poetry read and written; talking across boundaries; changed perceptions and attitudes.

> Or, a woman who has lived for ten years with a man who beats her has held tight to the secret of that fact, thinking she is wrong, stupid, lacking courage, trapped -- then sees a movie about domestic violence, listens to other women's stories, starts to talk, develops her strength, draws on the collective wisdom and experience of the other ten women in her ABE class, and figures out "a way out of no way."

> Or, on a smaller scale, somebody says "What does this word mean?" and dictionary definitions are compared with meanings derived from context, the context being lived experience, common sense, thoughtful speculation--as well as the written text.



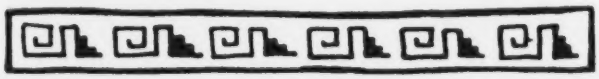
Because you can only think critically <u>about something</u>, there is no possibility of critical thinking as pure process, devoid of content. And the content of adult literacy is not fixed. It can include reading (cookbooks, comic books, plays, editorials, contracts, short stories, menus...); writing (lists, letters, essays, poems...); speaking (in-class discussions, advocacy in welfare offices, telephoning, speech-making...); mathematical theory, computation, and practical applications; problems, intimate and global; issues and events; traditional academic subjects such as science and social studies; job skills; and more.

This rich and varied content suggests all kinds of ways of learning and approaches to teaching. At the same time, it suggests multiple forms of critical thinking. Puzzling out a math problem, critically appraising one's job options,

strategizing a community response to increased drug traffic, or reading a painting or an editorial are very different acts, though each is an example of critical thinking. In the context of adult literacy, we can't reduce critical thinking to a single, linear, or neatly ordered process.

We can, however, appreciate and validate the many varieties of critical thinking that are brought daily into our classrooms. We can help students give voice to the questions they have, which they've been taught not to have. We can insist on making our classes places where students are free, as one teacher says, "to openly express their critical examination of the world."

We can also use our experience as a map. This is the road we took from here to there. This was the short but boring route. This was the longer but more interesting trip. We've been here and there, where do we want to go next?



Comparing our teaching experiences, we find common threads. Discovery and naming are often the twin beginnings of critical process. The language in which discovery is cast directs where that discovery will move. For example, an ABE class comprised of mothers was reading a story that opened up discussion of teenagers, sex, and unwanted pregnancy. The teacher's first inclination was to go forward with the women's concerns by developing curriculum on "teenage sexuality" or "parenting adolescents." But an invitation to the students to summarize their discussion brought out other frameworks for analysis. A blackboard listing of summary statements (words and phrases) included intriguing possibilities for further study. After some debate the group chose the phrase "the facts of life" as a heading for their discussion and as a theme for exploration. This choice of language is not about "progressing" from the concrete to the abstract (a sequential approach to developing skills which literacy teachers are often advised to take). It is about conceptualizing as a critical tool which legitimizes not just the personal but the social-historical truth of concrete experience rather than just submerging it.

Critical thinking needs time to flow. The process is nourished in a climate where sustained dialogue and time for reflection are treated as necessary conditions for learning.

Teachers sometimes cite students' erratic attendance in literacy programs as a reason to make each class session as self-contained as possible--if you try to do a longer reading that spans several days, for example, the continuity is broken when people aren't in class each day. This isn't

to say that it's meaningless to address an issue in a one-time discussion, reading or writing activity; sometimes a careful plan for a single session brings a needed focus or sense of accomplishment and completion. But it takes time to look deeply into any important question. You need time to gather resources, establish context, read about and listen to various points of view, express your own thoughts, assimilate new information, reflect on your learning, consider possibilities for action, integrate learning and practice of basic skills with the process of critical analysis.

Mostly free of the distractions and pressures that crowd other parts of people's lives, adult literacy classes are places where reflection and dialogue can happen; we need to make them places where reflection and dialogue do happen.

Writing in one's own voice is a powerful act. Critical investigation of language is an essential part of developing literacy, and a tool for accessing the power of voice. In her essay, "Problems of Language in a Democratic State,"* June Jordan offers a familiar, simple sentence for analysis: "I lost my job." Then asks, "Who in his or her right mind loses a job? What should I understand if you say something like that to me? Should I suppose that one morning you got up and drank your coffee and left the house but, then, you just couldn't find your job?" Doors open in an adult literacy class when you juxtapose these sentences: "I lost my job." "G.M. laid off half the shift. They fired me." And voices fly all over the room when you ask these questions, "Who did what to whom? Who's responsible?"

Examining meanings is a way for people to transform their relationship to language. Gradually, language becomes something owned and used; no longer just a trap.

Discussions of critical thinking in adult literacy education typically focus on problem-solving, in one guise or another. But celebration is an equally important though often obscured facet of critical thinking. Writing about Sistren, a Jamaican working class women's theater collective, Honor Ford-Smith has this to say: "The development of each person's consciousness depends on the possibility for reflection on failure or celebration of our small or large successes."**

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* June Jordan, "Problems of Language in a Democratic State," in On Call: Political Essays (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1985), p. 32.

** Honor Ford-Smith, "Sistren: Exploring Women's Problems Through Drama," Jamaica Journal, 1986.

Celebration implies pride, and a sense of community. Problem-focused explorations are limited to the extent that the exploration remains bound by the problem-definition. The work of critically examining a problem inevitably reshapes it, and opens up new avenues of thinking and acting. Recognizing that work, and sharing it, is a way of extending its effects. Critical thinking is strengthened when it is woven into the daily life of the community. Celebration turns our attention from what is wrong to what is possible. It is part of the critical process: to see what has been accomplished, and what can be created.

Critical thinking theorists can be divided into two camps: those who see action as intrinsic to critical thinking and those who don't. Of course, those who argue for the necessity of action debate among themselves what constitutes action. As literacy teachers committed to a critical reading of the "world and the word", our commitment to social change on any number of levels must be clear. A more complex and challenging issue has to do with connecting action and change.

Purposeful action leads to change. We can appreciate the importance of action as a part of critical thinking if we see it as a strand of learning rather than its culmination. We need to ask: what kind of action emerges from our teaching? A genuinely open and critical process can lead to unexpected results. Belief in the possibility of change is what motivates action, and to be meaningful, the action undertaken must be connected in a thoughtful way to the change we want to make. We need to remember that "Unity is not merely discovered but built... and the kind of learning that ends in action, starts in action."*

And critical thinking--no matter how broadly defined--isn't the totality of what teaching, learning, and change are all about, it is a part. The "language of critique and the language of possibility" (in one writer's words) are mutually supportive, not mutually exclusive. A classroom where answers are not always fixed, and indeed are not always sought, can be a unique, sometimes magical place. Our respect for each other's freedom to dream--in images that are sometimes hazy, other times clear but indescribable, unfamiliar or jarring--can help us move toward a politics of education that is ever more radicalizing, and liberating:

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* Berenice Fisher, "What Is Feminist Pedagogy?," Radical Teacher (18).

The possible shapes of what has not been before exist only in that back place, where we keep those unnamed, untamed longings for something different and beyond what is now called possible, and to which our understanding can only build roads.*

---

* Audre Lorde, "An Interview: Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich," in Sister Outsider (Trumansburg, NY: The Crossing Press, 1984), p. 101.

"The Work of an Active Mind": A Critical Literacy Collage

"One of the tools in basic thinking comes by questioning authority. We just question it all.... One of the crucial tools is the ability to question the essentials and to question them not as an intellectual exercise, but with the intent that if they come up with new answers, no matter how discomforting those answers are, they will change their behavior."

"Charlotte Bunch and Betty Powell talk about Feminism, Blacks, and Education as Politics", from Learning Our Way.

"Much anxiety for me and my students accompanied these kinds of classes. They were unfamiliar learning moments for all of us. I came to class prepared to pose a number of problems for discussion and with a number of ways to develop literacy. At any given moment I had to be prepared to abandon my plans and move in the direction of the dialogic process. This is a very demanding way to teach and learn. You have to listen carefully all the time. The teacher does not routinely lecture. The class does not follow a syllabus; it can be accurately described mostly when it is over. You cannot do one preparation for several classes, because the same process rarely reproduces itself in different groups of students. This milieu demands that the teacher surrender his or her authoritarian supports. I needed to come down from my pedestal and out from behind my tie and my desk. It was my responsibility to initiate the process and to keep it going, by setting problems for critical excursion."

Ira Shor, Critical Teaching and Everyday Life, p. xxv.

"... in the connection between the educator and the learner, mediated by the object to be revealed, the most important factor is the development of a critical attitude in relation to the object and not on discourse by the educator about the object. And even when, in the midst of these relations, the educator and the learner come close to the object of their analysis and become curious about its meaning, they need the kind of solid information that is indispensable to accurate analysis. To know is not to guess; information is useful only when a problem has been posed. Without this basic problem-statement, the furnishing of information is not a significant moment in the act of learning and becomes simply the transfer of something from the educator to the learner."

Paulo Freire, Pedagogy in Process: The Letters to Guinea-Bissau.

"The role of the teacher? Making the process conscious, the content significant. Want to know, yourself, how the problems in the story got resolved. Learn what daily survival wisdom these women have. Care. Don't let it stop at commiseration. Try to help them generalize from the specifics. Raise issues of who and what they continually have to bump up against on the life-road they've planned for themselves. Make lists on the board. Keep the scale human. Who are the people that get in the way? The social worker, the small claims court officer, husbands, the teacher, cops, kids on the block. Ask: what forces do they represent? Get as much consensus as possible before moving on. Note that there is most argument and disagreement on "husbands" and "kids on the block." Define a task for the next meeting. To sharpen their thinking on husbands and kids, have them make three lists. All the positive and negative things they can think of about men, children, and families. Anticipate in advance that they probably won't have the time or the will to write out full lists. But they will think about the question and be ready to respond in class."

Michelle Russell, Black-eyed Blues Connections: Teaching Black Women.

"Elements of what we want to end with must be present in some form from the start."

Ann Berthoff, The Making of Meaning.

"Student experience, like the culture and society of which it is part, is not all of one piece, and it is important to sort through its contradictions and to give students the chance to not only confirm themselves but also to raise the questions: what is it this society has made of me that I no longer want to be? Similarly, this means teaching students how to critically appropriate the codes and vocabularies of different cultural experiences so as to provide them with the skills they will need in order to define and shape, rather than simply serve, in the modern world. In other words, students need to understand the richness and strengths of other cultural traditions, other voices, particularly as these point to forms of self-empowerment and social empowerment."

Henry Giroux, "Critical Literacy and Student Experience".

"Rationality is not unnecessary. It serves the chaos of knowledge. It serves feeling. It serves to get from this place to that place. But if you don't honor those places, then the road is meaningless."

Audre Lorde, Sister Outsider.

"The very concept of knowledge held by a society is one of the methods through which the power relations within that society are legitimized."

Editorial, Womanspeak! # 23, April 1988.

"Once knowledge can be analyzed in terms of region, domain, displacement, transposition, one is able to capture the process by which knowledge functions as a form of power. There is an administration of knowledge, a politics of knowledge, relations of power which pass via knowledge."

Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977.

"Voicelessness presupposes powerlessness. ...If the objective of education is to empower students intellectually, and, to some extent emotionally, their voice must receive validation. This entails both a critical stance towards their already acquired voice, obtained from the contradictory sources of mass culture and peer interaction, as well as an effort to enrich this voice with historical and critical dimension."

Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux, Education Under Siege.

"I begin with meaning, not with thought ("Think of what you want to say...") or language ("Choose the words which you feel would fit your idea best..."); we will never get the two concepts together unless we begin with them together. The making of meaning is the work of the active mind, of what used to be called the imagination -- that power to create, to discover, to respond to forms of all kinds. My guiding philosophical principle is that this form-finding and form-creating is a natural activity; the...central pedagogical principle is that we teach our students how to form by teaching them that they form."

Ann Berthoff, Forming/Thinking/Writing.

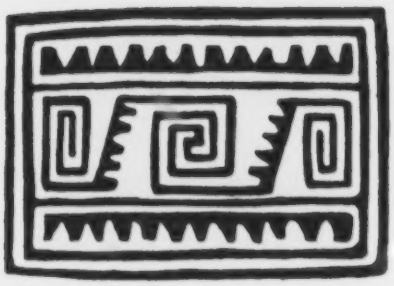
"Often we were able to stimulate awareness of questions and problems affecting women but there was no structure for follow-up activity. We could not see where discussions on teenage pregnancy, rape, childcare and female unemployment were going... [We found that these problems were not] peculiar to Sistren. They were problems which confront every group of women we have worked with. They were contradictions that could only be explained in terms of the reality in which we worked. I think we survived that period because of two things: first and most important, the immediacy of the early work to our lives and our subsequent commitment to it, and second, because we implemented a careful analysis of the obstacles we were encountering."

Honor Ford-Smith, "Sistren: Exploring Women's Problems Through Drama," Jamaica Journal.

Curriculum Projects

The curriculum samples which follow are indicative of the ongoing nature of our work. They aren't in any sense "finished products", but offer instead a kind of picture album of works in progress.

Curriculum represents the ground on which theory and practice meet. The themes, approaches, materials and activities written about here are a reflection of individual teachers' critical and creative decisions. They also reflect the divergent, overlapping, unsettling, and inspiring dialogues among colleagues and with students that are at the source of our work.



Beauty, Weight, and Nutrition

Sarah Boyer

I. Introduction

I have always worked in alternative education. My own experiences in public school led to my desire to help change the learning environment for both children and adults. I wanted to see a creative, open atmosphere in which people questioned freely and learned to trust their own knowledge and life's experiences.

In September 1986, at the beginning of the class year, I asked students to give me a list of topics that they were interested in discussing and reading about. One of these topics was weight. Many women students in the class had complained about being overweight and how this lessened their chances of attracting men.

In November, 1986, the morning Basic Skills class started a unit on Beauty and Health. The discussions reminded me of a time 15 years ago when I was becoming aware of the oppression of women in our society; in particular to the media stereotyping of women which relays the message that women have to look a certain way to be considered beautiful and that is very important to their role in life. I attended a slide show created by Jean Kilbourne, which depicted the subtle and not-so-subtle ways women are objectified in newspapers, magazines and television.

I thought a good point to start with was to take a look for ourselves at visual portrayals of women, and we spent a class looking at magazines such as Essence, Ladies Home Journal, Ebony and others. The discussions focused on what the students thought of the pictures--Is she beautiful? What do you like about the way she looks? What don't you like? Does this scene seem real to you? Do people actually look like this? How do men look in these pictures? Do they look the same as the women? How are they alike/different? Student reaction ranged from some envy of the models to "I don't want to look like those people in the magazines." "I would like to look like myself." "I would like to lose a few pounds."

I asked about the advertising aspect of these pictures and how the advertisers were selling their product. Most people made a connection between the product and making it more attractive by including a "beautiful" woman in the picture. One student brought up the idea that these magazines were actually promoting sex by the appearance of these women. Students wrote about how the ads made them feel about themselves.

"I got a tip that Secret anti-perspirant is strong enough for a man."
"You heard right. But it's made for a woman. Sorry, fella."
Dare to be More.
More
MENTHOL
FILTER CIGARETTES
120's
SURGEON GENERAL'S WARNING: Smoking By Pregnant Women May Result in Fetal Injury, Premature Birth, And Low Birth Weight.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

From that class, I was not surprised that students, just as all of us, had internalized the message that it was not o.k. to weigh what you weigh, or to accept yourself just as you were. The underlying message in all this was that there is always something you can improve on, and that you have to "fix" yourself to be o.k. for other people.

I wanted to open up discussion about assumptions and stereotypes about beauty and weight and how they hurt people's self-esteem. I approached these issues indirectly by first listing sixteen adjectives on the board (that have been used to stereotype fat and thin people) and discussing their meanings. My original thought was to include dictionary work in this exercise. Instead students made up their own definitions which were far richer and more variant in meaning than a standard dictionary.

attractive - look very nice to you
dress nice
look sexy
way they act
be yourself, what you are

cold - cruel, not caring

confident - sure of yourself
trust yourself
be yourself
self respect
believe in yourself
trust others
knows what he has to do

delicate - soft, like a new born baby
break very easy
sensitive, hurt easily
old people are delicate

graceful - ballet dancer
light on their feet
not stiff
limber, loose
flexible

lazy - don't want to get up
don't want to go to work
don't want to do what you're supposed to be doing
not being responsible

light - dizzy, sick
light-headed
light-footed; swift
light as a feather

pretty - pretty dirty
some person might have a pretty face but they have a nasty personality

soft - soft as a grape
you're not using your head
you mess yourself up

solid - solid as a rock
together in their life
have their life in order
filled out person

warm - kind, understanding

After students had written their own definitions, I asked them to put each adjective under the appropriate category of fat or thin:

Adjectives	a fat person is	a thin person is
warm	warm	cold
cold	soft	light
soft	lazy	pretty
light	solid	delicate
solid	comfortable	unforgiving
pretty	handsome	responsible
delicate		graceful
comfortable		attractive
unforgiving		confident
responsible		successful
graceful		
attractive		
confident		
successful		
lazy		
handsome		

Then we discussed as a group why they chose the category for each adjective. "Why did you put competent under thin?" "Could a fat person be light?" "Can fat people be unforgiving?" "Why is a thin person attractive?" A couple of students refused to categorize some of the adjectives, even when I deliberately pressured them to do so. However, most students categorized the adjectives quickly and, in more descriptive writings, made the following statements:

> "I know thin people who want to lay around. They want to stay in bed til noon. No one's depending on them. They have no obligations. I would not want to depend on them. A fat person don't have to be lazy. That's not true. He's skinny. He lays around all the time."

> "Skinny people put down fat people."

> "Some fat people are nasty."

> "Some skinny people are cold-hearted."

> "I snuggled up to my mother. She was stout, warm and safe."

From there, I thought it would be useful to confront assumptions and stereotypes. I put these statements on the board and asked students to respond to them:

"Gay people are crazy."

"West Indian people cause trouble."

"Black people are..."

"Women are..."

We talked about these blanket statements, and I asked people to finish the last two about Black people and women. The first two statements had been said by people in the class previously; students saw the connection between labelling other groups of people and having it done to them.

We then confronted stereotypes of fat and thin people. Some of the stereotypes people held onto were "Heavy-set people are very warm" and "Most fat people are lazy". However, there were qualifying statements such as, "Most people say thin people are pretty" and these truthful words, "Most thin people put down a person who's heavy-set". These are some of the other comments which emerged in the discussion:

"Some fat people are happy."

"I want to look my best."

"I used to feel self-conscious."

"I don't want to be fat because of my high blood pressure."

"You've got a beautiful face. I hate that."

"Look at mine. I'm like ten months pregnant."

"It's not easy being heavy set."

"If you're stout and happy and feel good about yourself, I don't see anything wrong with that."

"Some men like fat women."

"A woman's supposed to be perfect."

"Some people like you the way you are."

We wrote a group opinion of how fat and thin women are treated differently. One student wrote the sentences on the board as they were dictated to her. In subsequent lessons, sentence structure, verb tense, and spelling were worked on. Students also wrote their own opinions and paired up to help with writing skills.

Group Writing

Some skinny people are cold-hearted to a fat person. But when you are a thin person, a man will look at you faster. He will say she look good. I would like to meet her. He will look at her body and say she is for me.

But if you are a fat person he will look at your face first and faster. He will say she has a pretty face.

He will say she has a beautiful face but she is too fat, and most people will say that.

So you will feel bitter and lazy and don't care. Not all fat people, but some will feel this way.

****

To complete this section on beauty we read a number of poems from the Fat Black Woman's Poems by Grace Nichols. The Fat Black Woman's Poems are a celebration of the beauty of Black women which served to validate students' emerging feelings about themselves. The poems also presented a strong alternative to the self-hating, objectifying images of women in the media. We spent the next class summarizing our reading, writing and discussion of beauty.

Beauty
is a fat black woman
walking the fields
pressing a breezed
hibiscus
to her cheek
while the sun lights up
her feet

--from "Beauty," in
The Fat Black Women's Poems
by Grace Nichols

The focus of our unit at this point turned to diets, nutrition and health. My question to the group was "Why would anyone want to diet?" Students had knowledge and understanding of good nutrition and the need to be on a natural and sensible diet for maintaining good health. We discussed ways to lose weight and also fad diets.

Notes from discussion on
"Why Would Anyone Want to Diet?"

Two main points were raised when I asked the class for valid reasons for going on a diet. One student said that would help you feel good about yourself (if you lost weight, of course). Most of the discussion, however, focused on what happens when you don't eat well. Students brought up heart trouble, poor circulation, stroke, diabetes, kidney failure, high blood pressure and depression as medical problems exaggerated by obesity. If you eat sensibly, this would lessen your chances of getting any of the above diseases. The class brought up the point that diabetes runs in families, and one student pointed out that thin people get these diseases also.

Students discussed ways to lose weight--steam, bake or broil food, cut down eating foods with cholesterol, exercise properly, eat certain foods such as grapefruit, cottage cheese and liver, and cut down on salt.

****

To reinforce the idea that students already know a great deal about subjects that are particularly relevant to their lives, we used reading material from the book Design for Health and compared student information to that in the text. In addition, we went back to advertising and critically examined diet ads found in various popular magazines.

NEW MEDICAL BREAKTHROUGH!

LOSE UP TO 50 POUNDS WITHOUT DIETING!

GUARANTEED 100%

NEW FORMULATION SUPRESSES CALORIE ABSORPTION

In a major medical breakthrough, the scientific community has at last developed a powerful fast acting weight loss compound that virtually eliminates dieting, eliminates strenuous exercise and, most importantly, eliminates fat, flab and cellulite! The powerful bio active ingredient in Cal-Ban 3000 (cyamopsis tetragonolobus) works by short circuiting the fat building process before your body can turn excess calories into figure-destroying fat. Now this amazing weight loss compound is available through Anderson Pharmacals without the necessity of a doctor's prescription. No matter how many times you have tried to lose weight and failed before — you will reach your weight-loss goal this time! We guarantee it!

Incredible But True! Read These FACTS

NEW!

FACT: You can eat all your favorite foods and still lose weight! Cal-Ban 3000 ™ bonds with the food you eat and prevents absorption of a substantial portion of the calories, forcing your body to burn fat, flab and cellulite for energy.

FACT: Your weight loss is automatic! Just take your Cal-Ban 3000 ™ every day and you will automatically lose weight. There is no calorie counting, no tortuous exercises and no dangerous stimulants.

FACT: Millions of fat cells will begin to shrink within 24 hours as your body goes on a fat burning spree. Fat, flab and cellulite from your waist, hips, thighs and buttocks will be metabolized away!

FACT: Cal-Ban 3000 ™ is absolutely safe. It contains no stimulants or amphetamines. No harmful side effects have been reported.

FACT: A clinical study of the Cal-Ban 3000 ™ formulation showed 100% success! Everyone lost weight! A team of European doctors tested a number of overweight women. In the group that took the Cal-Ban 3000 ™ formulation, everyone lost a substantial amount of weight. The amazing results of this study published in the British Journal of Nutrition, Vol. 52, pp. 97-105, stated: "Bodyweight was significantly reduced during the study even though the patients were specifically asked not to alter their dietary habits."

FACT: IF YOU ORDER TODAY YOU CAN TAKE ADVANTAGE OF OUR INTRODUCTORY DISCOUNT PRICES!

Cal-Ban 3000 Lets You .....

- Eat all you want and still lose weight. (The formula bonds with food preventing absorption of much of your caloric intake.)
- Lose weight whether you exercise or not. (Because your body is absorbing less it burns fat, flab and cellulite for energy.)
- Keep your pep without getting jittery. (The formula has no dangerous stimulants, no harmful side effects, no chemicals.)
- Melt away flab — and keep it off. (Most diets fail because they require ongoing discipline and will power. This formula doesn't.)

Please Note: Because Cal-Ban 3000 ™ is not effective in preventing weight deposits of fat and muscle it is possible Cal-Ban 3000 ™ has absolutely no harmful side effects, some people tend to lose 3 to 5 lbs. the first week, when you get to become less than it, you start to lose weight but slightly, reduce your calorie intake by one or two a day or fast. Also, before starting any weight loss program you should check with your physician to be sure you are in health to do so.

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UNCONDITIONAL 100% MONEY BACK GUARANTEE

If you do not lose more weight with Cal-Ban 3000 ™ than you ever thought possible, more than you ever lost with any other product or program, just return the empty bottle and we will promptly and cheerfully refund 100% of your money.

Thousands of Women Get Back Girlish Figures on incredible Super Diet

Doctor's Explosive Quicktrim II Tablet Diet Plan Burns Fat with such astonishing speed . . . you can lose up to 20, 40, 80 lbs. or more in record time!

Thousands of women from coast to coast are enjoying freedom from fat on Doctor's amazing Quicktrim II Diet Plan. Women just like you are conquering every years of figures on record time.

GET THE FAT OFF FAST

The Super Diet with powerful new's a diet that takes you on a crash diet. It's a diet that lets you eat delicious foods. It's a diet that's designed to help you lose weight fast. It's a diet that's designed to help you lose weight fast.

START YOUR BLITZ ON FAT

ORDER NOW WITHOUT RISK

SPECIAL DISCOUNT OFFER. WE PAY POSTAGE!

LOST 97 lbs.

STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK: Julia Patterson lost 10, then 30... in 1 week and 4 months on the Quicktrim II Diet Plan.

LOST 43 lbs.

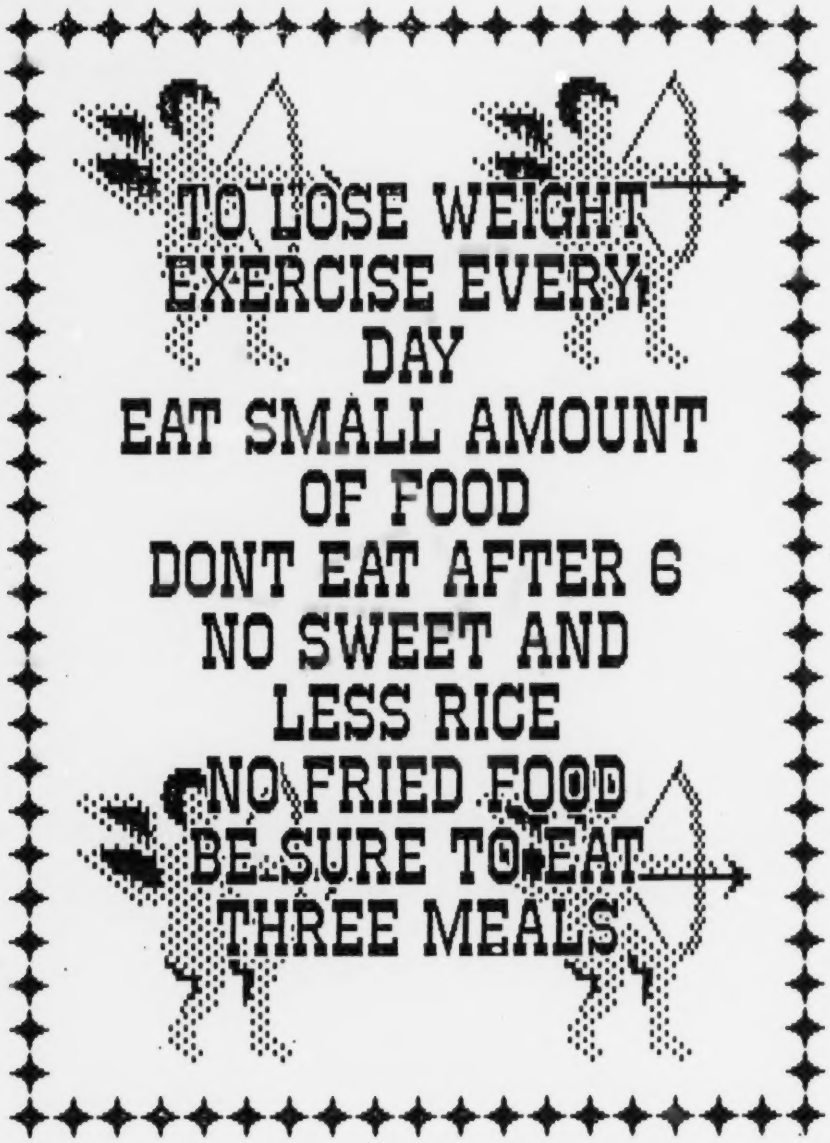
CAMARILLO, CALIF.: Ruth Foster dropped an amazing 43 lbs. in record time on the Super Diet and feels like a new bride today.

LOST 40 lbs.

CANTON, OHIO: Barb Hall used the Quicktrim Diet to get back her girlish figure and now looks fantastic in fashionable clothes.

We talked about the ways in which these ads made false claims and exaggerated the effects of the diets. We also discussed the harm that fad diets would cause to the body, the need for eating balanced meals, and the difficulty in both feeding our children within severely limited incomes and the kids' desire for junk food.

Finally, we made up our own ads for healthy diet and exercise, using "The Print Shop" software* and computers.



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* "The Print Shop," Broderbund Software

Evaluation of the Unit: Beauty, Weight, Nutrition

This unit can be evaluated on different levels: (1) by a change or shift in students' attitudes and feelings about themselves which is positive and empowering, (2) in terms of appropriate materials used, and (3) in methods of both learning new material and eliciting student knowledge.

An informal evaluation of our work occurred when we were summarizing our discussions and readings on "beauty". A shift in attitudes toward this subject had taken place. Although some students had voiced these opinions (which follow) before we had discussions, most students did not. In discussing the images of women in advertising, students said:

> "I don't want to look like those people in the magazines."
>
> "I would like to look like myself."
>
> "I would like to lose a few pounds."

Comments concerning labeling and categorizing people with stereotypes or the adjectives we used were:

> "The adjectives apply to all people."
>
> "These words describe all kinds of people, not just one person."
>
> "You can't judge a book by its cover."

The poetry about "fat, Black women" received the strongest positive reaction:

> "She's [the poet] saying something nice for a change."
>
> "She's not putting down fat, Black women."
>
> "She's praising them, giving them recognition."
>
> "She's saying, 'I'm going to show you another side'"

I believe building self-esteem through the use of positive images of Black women was the most successful part of this unit. I believe that many students already have the awareness and acceptance of who they are, but that they are constantly being told in various ways that they are not o.k. To validate one's own person and that experience strengthens a person's ability to succeed on her own terms, despite the sexism and racism prevalent in our own society.

The integration of student discussion, reading material, advertisements, use of computers and student writings was decided lesson by lesson, and in the case of the use of adjectives, by the students themselves. Student input was a priority for reinforcing the building of self-esteem.

Computers were integrated well into the curriculum. Students increased their skill with word processing in making up the student dictionaries. They were also used creatively in making up our own diet ads to counteract fad diets.

Reading comprehension skills were also developed with the use of Design for Health. However, vocabulary and pronunciation were difficult and some of the material was tedious to wade through. I would be more selective in the use of this material in the future.

Finally, the group discussions and readings were highly effective in building support for new concepts to take hold, and reinforced positive images of Black women in the group.

Using questions to draw people out to express their opinions, and validating their knowledge by comparing it to material in print, is a way to teach people to trust themselves in the learning process and allows students to seek more questions, rather than feeling there is one right answer for everything.

Real Life Dramas

Sarah Boyer

Students in my morning class talk a lot about the problems they're having with their kids. People are very supportive of each other and usually willing to give advice on how they would handle difficult situations with their kids. At times, however, the discussions have felt circular-- the problems are put out on the table, and they are discussed, but never resolved. There was a feeling of helplessness as to what to do in certain situations.

Having tried with little success (partially because, I think, I am not a parent) to offer solutions directly, I decided to present problems, based on actual student experiences, in play form. I briefly described the characters and the scenes in the skits and asked students to play the parts. After each skit, I led discussion with brainstorming questions about the feelings of the characters, what the problem was, what were possible alternatives to solving the problem, and then on a more personal level, what would you do in this situation.

The following are the skits themselves, the questions I raised, and some student responses to these questions.

My Son is a Thief

Characters:

Mary - a mother
Eddie - her son

The Scene:

Mary comes home after a long day at work. She walks into Eddie's room. He's lying on his bed watching T.V. Mary notices something different about the T.V.

Mary: That's not your old T.V. That looks like a new one. Where did you get that?

Eddie: A friend of mine gave it to me.

Mary: You've got friends who can just give away T.V.'s? I don't believe you. You're full of it.

Eddie: It's the truth. And if you don't believe me, too bad. Quit bugging me.

Mary: I heard last week that Ray's liquor store got broken into, and they think some kids did it. The police said $500 was stolen from the cash register and a small T.V. was taken from the front of the store.

Eddie: So!! What does that have to do with me?

Mary: That wouldn't be the T.V. that was stolen, would it?

Eddie: What if I told you no. You wouldn't believe me anyway. So I'm not going to answer you.

Mary: Listen, Eddie. I've been noticing you all week. You've got new clothes, a new watch, you're looking pretty good. Where did you get that money?

Eddie: I got a new job - down at the gas station on the corner. Pumping gas after school.

Mary: How come whenever I go by there, I don't see you? I think you're lying. I think you broke into Ray's and stole the money and T.V.!

Eddie: So big deal! You never give me any money. I'm sick of living this way. Never have nothing. You can keep going to the poor house, but you're not going to take me with you!

Mary: I don't know what I'm going to do with you. I'm at the end of my rope. I'm calling the cops.

My Son is a Thief

Questions

1. Do you think Mary should call the cops and report her son?

2. Do you think Eddie's been in trouble before? How do you know?

3. What might be some ways Mary could help Eddie? Turn him around? Do you think she should help him at all?

Some of the suggestions that students brought up were:

Mary should sit down and talk to him. It's important to realize the importance of what he did and work out a way to rectify his actions.

Mary should just call the cops. She probably has been through this before with Eddie, and he's had enough chances to clean up his act. She is no longer responsible for what he does.

Mary and Eddie can't talk to each other. They don't communicate well enough to work this out, so they should go to a counselor to help them sort things out.

Eddie should talk to a male friend about his problems. He doesn't seem to be getting anywhere with his mother, and a friend would probably understand him better.

Mary should make Eddie bring the T.V. back and suffer the consequences if the owner wants to press charges.

Can I Say No?

Characters:

Donna - a single mother
Carol - her daughter, 12 years old

The Scene:

Donna and Carol are in Zayre's. Donna has promised Carol that she will buy her an Easter dress and shoes.

Donna: O.K., Carol. Let's go over to the dresses first.

Carol: Wait a minute. Oh, God - look at that great, tough-looking jacket. I want it. Can I have it, Ma?

Donna: Let's look at the dresses for now. Come on.

Carol: Ma, see that necklace and earrings. They look like real gold! I want them. Hey, they're only $25.00 for the set.

Donna: How many times do I have to tell you - we'll look at the dresses first and then we'll discuss the other stuff.

Carol: You're just going to say no, anyway. That's all you ever say. I think sometimes you're going to let me have the money, but in the end, sure enough, you won't give it to me. I'm sick of it. I never have anything like what my friends have. They look good all the time, and I always look bad.

Donna: That's not true. You always look nice. Maybe there will be some money left after we buy the dress and shoes.

Carol: Who are you kidding? You really take me for a fool. Oh, God - look at that makeup kit - just what Shirley bought yesterday. She won't share any of the stuff with me. She's so cheap. It's only $14.99. Please, Ma, can I have it?

Donna: All right! Just to get you off my back - here. Take the money and buy it. I'm going over to the dresses.

Carol: Thanks. I finally got something from you. Look at that fantastic shirt! Now, if I can just separate her from the rest of that money...

Can I Say No?

Questions

1. Do you think Donna should have given Carol the money for the makeup kit? Why/why not?

2. How is Carol manipulating her mother?

3. Why can't Donna say no? What are some of the reasons why Donna can't say no?

4. Can you suggest another way for Donna to handle Carol?

What should Donna do with Carol?

* Give Carol an allowance
* She shouldn't give in
* Buy the makeup instead of the dress

Student responses to Donna's hassles with her daughter revealed identification with the common problems of single parents trying to make ends meet, and not giving in to their children's demands.

Some students felt that Donna should just give Carol a weekly allowance, and Carol would have to buy what she wanted from that amount of money.

Other people just said that Donna should not give in to Carol's demands and still others thought Donna should buy either the makeup or the dress but not both. They felt that if she bought both, this would be a clear signal to Carol to keep harassing Donna for more things.

Who's In Charge?

Characters:

Betty	-	a single mother
Lisa	-	her 9 year old daughter
Ms. Brown	-	Lisa's teacher

Scene 1

Lisa has just come home from school. She is crying. Betty hugs her.

Betty: What's the matter, baby?

Lisa: I hate that teacher. I hate her, hate her.

Betty: Why? What did she do?

Lisa: (sobbing) She told me I was stupid in front of the whole class. I made a mistake on my math sheet. She made me do it over and over again. All the kids went to lunch, and she made me eat by myself in the room. When I was going to the bus at the end of school, she told me she didn't think I was going to pass this year. She said unless I try a lot harder I was going to stay back. She said I'd be with the baby kids. She hates me, Ma.

Betty: I can't believe she could be so mean to you. Are you sure you're telling me the truth? Maybe you don't listen to her enough.

Lisa: Ma - you've got to do something. She's awful. Why don't you believe me?

Betty: I do, honey. It's just that you're so upset, maybe it isn't that bad. I'm having a conference with her next week. Then we'll find out what's going on.

Who's In Charge?

Scene 1

Questions

1. What do you think of Betty's reaction to Lisa's story?

2. Can you think of another way Betty could have talked to Lisa?

3. How do you think it will affect Lisa when Betty tells her she doesn't believe her?

4. Why do you think Betty takes the teacher's "side"?

Who's In Charge?

Scene 2

Betty is sitting in the classroom with Ms. Brown.
It is the night for parent-teacher conferences.
They are discussing Lisa.

Ms. Brown: Well, like I said, Betty, Lisa is not doing very well this term. I don't know what's gotten into her. She used to be a good student.

Betty: Ms. Brown, Lisa told me you called her stupid last week. She said you made her eat her lunch by herself and you told her she wouldn't pass this year. She was really upset, and I thought she was exaggerating. Is any of this true?

Ms. Brown: I didn't call her stupid. I was starting to get frustrated with her. I might have said she did something stupid. She didn't want to go eat in the cafeteria. She was so upset, I told her it might be better for her to be alone for a while. I told her she might not pass this year because she needs to know this isn't fun and games anymore. She's been fooling around a lot in school.

Betty: When did this start?

Ms. Brown: The past few months. Is something wrong at home? I know you are a single mother. It must be very difficult to be a mother and a father.

Betty: I am doing the best I can. I think something is wrong at school.

Ms. Brown: Do you help Lisa with her homework? She probably needs more attention from you.

Betty: You know, somehow this doesn't sit right with me.

Ms. Brown: O.K., Betty. I've told you what I see is the problem. I've given you a suggestion on how to deal with it. You don't seem to like it. What do you suggest?

Betty: ----------

Who's In Charge?

Scene 2

Questions

1. Do you believe Ms. Brown when she tells her version of what happened to Lisa?

2. Do you think Betty asserts herself with Ms. Brown? What could Betty have said when Ms. Brown asks her if something is wrong at home?

3. Do we know whether Betty is helping Lisa with her homework? Why is this important to the story? Is this the answer to Lisa's problems at school?

4. If you were Betty, what would you tell Ms. Brown?

Students identified strongly with Betty's predicament, but when asked whether Betty should assert herself with Ms. Brown and make it clear that it was the teacher's responsibility to get Lisa to improve her grades, students backed off. One student said she thought Betty should find out what more she could do at home to help Lisa.

A couple of students did say that parents take the teacher's side against their kids, even when they know the kids are telling the truth. I think the belief is strong here that the teacher represents the ultimate authority, and it is better to go along with the teacher than to have the teacher give the child more trouble.

Discussion was rich with different opinions about what the characters should do in their situations to improve them. Most opinions were focused on the characters rather than a student's own experience. This allowed students to express their opinions about a problem that was not identified as theirs. It is therefore difficult to determine if any students were able to use these alternatives in their own situations.

One student, who had difficulty confronting teachers because of her own lack of education, has become more assertive in requesting information about her daughter's progress and, in fact, transferred her daughter to a better school.

The fact that there was no "right" answer to any of these situations opened new possibilities for students dealing with similar issues in their own lives.

As an extension of this work, students wrote on one of the following:

Who's In Charge? - Topics for Writing

1. The biggest problem I have with my kids is...
2. When I have a fight with my kids...
3. The thing I like best about my kids is...
4. I worry about my kids because...
5. I liked the way I handled that problem with my kids. This is what I did:

In addition, a group of students made up a short skit using characters, scenes, and conflicts I had given them. This was less successful in that the time allotted for this to develop was much too short. In addition, the choices for characters, conflicts and scenes were overwhelming and could be shortened.

Characters

a single mother
a single mother's teacher
a five year old daughter
a 10 year old son
a father
a welfare worker
a 16 year old brother
a 14 year old sister
two strangers
a young grandmother
the owner of a variety store
a minister
the brother's best friend
a boyfriend
the single mother's friend
the son's teacher
the principal of the school
the father's neighbor

Characteristics

smart
pretty
stupid
proud
tired
attractive
loud
nosy
lovable
strict
angry
sad
funny
needy
strong
young
selfish
critical
accepting
lazy
hard-working
blaming
spaced out
confident
self-righteous
religious
irresponsible

Scene

the kitchen
the classroom
a hospital room
a jail cell
a store
on the street
the bedroom
the bus stop
in a car
on a bus or subway
at Franklin Park
a welfare office
inside a church
a funeral parlor
a factory
a laundromat
a shelter

Conflict/Problem

theft
being pregnant
sickness
fighting
not working
accident
harassment from welfare
drugs
alcohol
no money

Suggestions for Writing a Skit

1. Decide who the characters are in your skit. You may think of people you know in your life. You can change their names and think of their characteristics when you are writing what they say to the other characters.

2. Decide where these characters are when they are talking to each other. This is the scene.

3. Think about how people, including yourself, would talk to each other when there is a problem or conflict between them. It would help to decide before you write what the conflict will be between the characters.

4. Do you want the characters to solve the problem by the end of the skit? Or do you want the people who read the skit to decide how to solve the problem?

Your Skit

Characters:

(describe them)

Scene:

Problem/Conflict:

Harriet Tubman, Oral History, and Community Art: Developing Literacy Through Research and Action

Lillia Cooper with Barbara Neumann

The Harriet Tubman House in Boston's South End was once a stop on the Underground Railroad and many years later was incorporated in the social service agencies of United South End Settlements (USES). This year, 1988, is the seventy fifth anniversary of Harriet Tubman's death. In honor of her life's work, USES has established a resource center which will eventually have a wide range of printed documents, art work, and oral history tapes. When the staff of USES began planning the Resource Center and a year-long series of related events, Lill Cooper approached her basic Literacy class about participating in this community education project.

What ensued was a many-faceted oral history project, which Lill describes as follows:

> One of the things we did from this Critical Thinking group was to work with interviewing. We started with having the students interview one another to find out more about each other. We used tape recorders and did it in class. So you and I would interview one another and then we would exchange so the questions you asked me I would then ask you. Then we would regroup, change partners, so that everybody got to eventually interview everybody else in the class and get to know each other. So it really helped to bring the class together.
>
> We decided to get involved in the Harriet Tubman celebration, the research for the resource center. Well, we started reading about Harriet Tubman and then making up questions about Harriet

Tubman which they (the students) had to research in order to answer. At USES there's a Harriet Tubman Club. So all this led to the students interviewing the members of the Harriet Tubman Club. And it took a lot of time and a lot of work to do this, but it culminated with the videotaping of the interview and then showing the tape to the students. The students were so impressed when they saw themselves. It was interesting just to see people who were so shy and, you know, you can barely hear in class -- when they started interviewing, how they came out-- they were the ones who spoke loud and clear. I had never done any videotaping before but that came out of the Critical Thinking group and all of this is leading to more interviewing.

There's an art exhibit going on now at the Tubman House and the project will be that the students will review the paintings that are on display and they will come up with questions to ask the artists...If you could meet the artist, what would you ask about these paintings?

And then they will eventually interview the artists. That will be videotaped too. When the exhibit opens there will be a jazz reception with the artists, and the students are going to be involved. It's a whole big project, a lot of work, a lot of patience. But it's wonderful. The students are working in the community. Making ties. Learning and educating. It's exciting to see.

Here is an outline of the practical activities and some outcomes of the project Lill described:

I. Introducing Oral History and Interviewing:

A. Paired interviews.

The focus was on individuals' lives and community memberships. Eventually, each student interviewed every other person in the class. Together, the class developed individual and group profiles.

By taping the interviews, and carefully planning the questions to be asked, students began to think about and discuss history in a new light: something that all of us are a part of and that all of us make.

B. Background research on Harriet Tubman.

1. Together, the class read a short (1 page) biography of Harriet Tubman. Oral reading allowed participants to help each other with pronunciation and definition of words, deriving meaning from context and other "basic reading skills." Students underlined difficult words, then entered them on computers for further work on spelling and usage.

2. Thinking about Harriet Tubman--Writing exercise: "Using each letter of her name, come up with a list of words beginning with those letters that you associate with Harriet Tubman. Using these words, write a story or essay about Harriet Tubman."

Each person developed a list of words, then shared to create a group list. Some of the words generated were these: trust, tough, beaten, escape, rebel, remarkable, intelligent, mission, tender, helping, action...

The students' writings about Harriet Tubman were later compiled in a book which is available through the resource center.

3. Based upon their specific, individual interests, students pursued their research, reading further about Harriet Tubman, the Underground Railroad, and the history of Black communities in Boston and in the South.

II. Oral History Interviews with Members of the Harriet Tubman Club.

A. Planning the interviews.

Students were presented with some basic information about the Harriet Tubman Club, then asked to develop a set of interview questions. Together, students developed questions, refined them, and practiced asking them in class.

The final interview protocol contained these Questions:

1.-- How was the club first formed?
2.-- How long has the club been around since first formed?
3.-- How many members then and how many now?
4.-- What do you have to do to become a member?
5.-- What is the purpose, goal, or mission of the club?
6.-- How has the club reached these goals?
7.-- What kinds of plans do you have for the future?
8.-- Does the club have written by-laws?
9.-- Do you have any social events?
10.-- What kind?
11.-- Are there any officers? Who are they and what office do they hold?
12.-- Who has been a member the longest?
13.-- Are there any other Harriet Tubman clubs in other parts of the city or state?
14.-- Is there a relationship between the Harriet Tubman Resource Center and the Harriet Tubman Club? How? If not, how can this be accomplished?
15.-- Does anyone remember or did anyone ever hear of Harriet Tubman's visit to Boston or her stay at the house on Holyoke Street?
16.-- Are there any members now who have personal stories about Harriet Tubman? Did any former members have stories about meeting her?

B. Conducting the interviews.

The interviews with the seven club members were videotaped by Lill.

Then, students reviewed the videos, critiqued their own technical skills in interviewing, and made suggestions for editing of the videotape.

After final editing, the audio and videotapes will be kept in the Harriet Tubman Resource Center.

Through the process of planning and carrying out this project, students developed relationships with the Harriet Tubman Club members. Plans are evolving for the students to continue their affiliation, perhaps by joining the club or supporting it in other ways. Some ideas so far include: working on further documentation of the Club members' lives and experiences with Harriet Tubman, assisting in community outreach, recruiting new members.

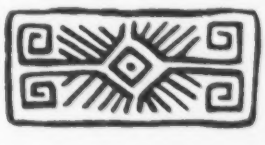
III. **Deepening Community Involvement and Building Research Skills: Interviewing Contemporary Artists**

A. Students viewed an exhibition of paintings at the Harriet Tubman Art Gallery-- then wrote about their impressions, their reactions to the paintings, their interpretations and assumptions about the artists' intentions.

B. Lill asked the class: If you could talk with the painter, what would you ask her or him? Individually, then as a group, students developed a list of questions they would pose to the artists.

C. Students met with the artists, either audiotaping or videotaping the interviews.

D. Finally, students participated in organizing a community celebration--a jazz reception marking the opening of the art exhibit.



Immigration

Ana Zambrano with Barbara Neumann

The participants in Ana Zambrano's English as a Second Language class come from Central America, Asia, the Caribbean and South America. They have been studying English for varying amounts of time, but most would describe themselves as "still beginners". The class meets two evenings a week, in a neighborhood community school.

Ana wanted to introduce the theme of "immigration", as this was an issue of common, ongoing interest among the participants. A number of students had been coming to her individually to discuss their situations with respect to the new immigration law. She realized that despite their shared concerns most people were reluctant to bring up the subject of amnesty and the new immigration law in class. While she was glad to advise them and help them access needed legal services, she also knew that students had a lot to learn from each other, and that they would be better equipped to address specific problems if they had a frame of reference that extended beyond their own, their family's, and their close friends' recent experience.

So she set about developing a lesson of several parts which had the intent of:

* expanding people's knowledge of U.S. immigrant history;
* generating discussion and critical analysis of government immigration policy;
* developing practical solutions to immediate problems and concerns (i.e., developing resources, skills, and an informational base for decision-making);
* creating a supportive environment for discussion of personally difficult and/or politically sensitive issues; and
* practicing and improving oral language and literacy skills.

Ana chose a reading which she thought would open up discussion and lead to critical reflection on several important issues. She selected a passage from The Woman Warrior by Maxine Hong Kingston, and introduced it to the class in a way that prompted active, immediate engagement with the text.

The class began with each student receiving an envelope containing slips of paper which looked something like this:

"Don't tell", advised my parents. "Don't go to San Francisco until they leave."

"No, they won't. They're promising that nobody is going to jail or get deported. They'll give you citizenship as a reward for turning yourself in, for your honesty." Lie to Americans. Tell them you were born during the San Francisco earthquake.

fake papers, to come to the city and get their papers straightened out. The immigrants discussed whether

wan? I've never been to Hong Kong or Taiwan. The big six? Where?" We don't belong anywhere since the Revolution. The old China has disappeared while we've been away.

"Don't be a fool," somebody else would say. "It's a trap. You go in there saying you want to straighten out your papers, they'll deport you."

or not to turn themselves in. "We might as well," somebody would say. "Then we'd have our citizenship for real."

"Don't you believe it. So-and-so trusted them, and he was deported. They deported his children too." "Where can they send us now? Hong Kong? Tai-

ters in the San Francisco or Sacramento Chinatown to urge wetbacks and stowaways, anybody here on

Occasionally the rumor went about that the United States immigration authorities had set up headquar-

Students worked in small groups to arrange the excerpt fragments in correct sequence. Because the passage had been cut differently for each group, more than one logically coherent ordering of the pieces was possible. Reading the organized passages aloud led to extensive discussion of which versions made sense and why-- a lively, student-directed grammar lesson. (Ana had also prepared supplemental grammar exercises as a follow-up/homework activity.)

Next, the class discussed the reading. Ana presented comprehension questions that required students to draw upon context clues for understanding-- e.g., When did this happen? How do you know? She also posed questions which allowed the insertion of historical information-- e.g., What revolution is referred to in the story? As discussion of the reading proceeded, students began talking about current realities for immigrants and refugees and shared questions they had about their own status under the new law. Clear, pressing concerns surfaced. A single line of text-- "They'll give you citizenship as a reward... for your honesty"-- sparked intense debate.

Then, students wrote on the question: <u>What is the difference between then and now?</u> The writing assignment helped people to focus both their questions and their emerging analysis of government policies. Finally, the class prepared questions for a workshop on the New Immigration Law that was to take place at the Community School the following week.

When Ana thought about ways to continue working on the theme of immigration during a subsequent cycle of classes, she knew that engagement in action must be a key part of any study she designed. The immigration law was having profound and immediate effects on people's lives, so analysis unconnected to focused action seemed an empty gesture.

Ana herself had been deeply involved in community organizing and political action in response to the immigration law. She had announced upcoming meetings and events in class, and encouraged students to participate, but no one did. One evening, however, Ana had to leave class early. She said to the group, "I can't be in class tonight because I have to go to a meeting." Ana's missing class implied to the students that she was involved in something important, something that she obviously took very seriously. They wanted to know: What meeting? Where? Can we come? So three students joined her.

A plan was developed for the students who attended the meeting to come back and report to the rest of the group. That happened, but students in the class didn't really talk very much, nor did they write when offered that option. It was clear, however, that the issues under discussion were of great importance to almost all the students. The teaching dilemma was how to unite, in a classroom setting, the real, passionate, practical needs of the community with the community's equally real language learning needs, given that the two are seen as separate and that only the latter are typically defined as the purpose of adult education.

Ana knew that her choice of form had to reflect both sets of needs, otherwise "education" and "action" would remain apparently separate.

So she tried another approach; she wrote about the experience of the meeting, and made it a reading selection for the class:

> On March 17, Carlos, Liliana, Pedro and Ana went to Centro Presente for a meeting about the new immigration law. In the meeting, they heard about what is going on in other communities and how this law affects so many people. Then, on March 22, Ana, Ann and other students from the Jackson/Mann went to another meeting on the same issue. There were many people from other organizations. Ana has gone to a lot of meetings ever since that law was signed (November 6, 1986). She has gone to meetings to get information on the new law, and meetings on education about the new law. Ana and other teachers at the Jackson/Mann have collected lots of information on the new law. We have talked about it in this class.
>
> Chris, Ana, Ann and people around town have agreed that some action must happen. So in the last meeting at Centro we decided we are going to have a march to show people in the government that we don't agree with that unfair law. The march will happen on April 30, 1988. People have been invited to join in.

After their reading, Ana asked the group: What do you think? Everyone got involved in the discussion, which included examination of both political issues and grammar. She followed the discussion with a writing assignment which (again) required people to think about language use and meaningful political action together.

1.) Have you asked Liliana, Pedro or Carlos about what they heard at that meeting?

2.) Have you asked them what people decided at that meeting?

3.) What do you think about this idea of the march?

4.) Have you gone to marches, demonstrations, or something like that before?

5.) Have you heard about the march they had in Washington last year?

6.) Have you thought of going to something like that before?

7.) What have you heard about the new immigration law? Write a paragraph. Use the present perfect, please.

Out of this experience, students formed a committee to work further on community organizing and education in response to the immigration law.

As Ana continued to work on the theme of immigration with her class she saw more and more the need for strategies to address daily struggles.

The class had always been encouraged to link political analysis with practical strategizing. It was important to Ana that the group evolve in such a way that students would be helping each other acknowledge urgent problems and fears while developing tools for survival and change. As trust and confidence grew, people were able to reveal more of their own life situations and collectively assemble resources and skills.

Ana found a number of creative ways to assist the group in its movement. At one point she brought in a letter which she had composed:

Boston
May 16, 1988

Dear Rosa,

Our cousin Maria tells me that you want to come to the United States. I write this letter to you because I want to warn you about the hard situation we immigrants are facing now in this country. Jobs are hard to find. The rent is very expensive. The houses are poorly ventilated and the winter is very cold.

On top of that, now with this new immigration law things are even more complicated. Everywhere you go to look for work they ask you for your green card. My friends and I feel scared. We don't know what to do.

Please, Rosita, think twice before you take off.

Take it easy.

Love,
Ana

This letter was a catalyst for discussing many issues. A homework assignment and in-class writing pushed people to think further about the questions Ana's letter had raised and to express their thoughts:

Name
Date

1. What do you think about this letter?

2. What does Ana give to her sister?

3. What does Ana tell Rosa about jobs?

4. What does she say about housing?

5. What does she think about the new Immigration Law?

Name
Date

Write a letter to someone and advise him/her about coming to this country.

As a next step, Ana devised a role-play which was carried out in class. Five students volunteered (or were chosen) to improvise roles based on the directions they received, printed on index cards:

> You are a woman from Central America. You live in Allston. You are making breakfast when the doorbell rings. Your name is Mila.

> You are Mila's husband. You are taking a shower when the doorbell rings. You sing "La Cucaracha". Your name is Luiz.

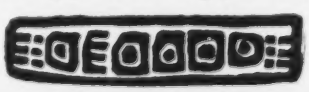
> You are Mila's brother. You live on the fourth floor. You're sleeping when the doorbell rings. Your name is Angel Arioldo.

> You are an immigration officer (la migra). You are looking for Angel Arioldo. You ask for him. You speak Spanish.

> You are an immigration officer (la migra). Your name is Joseph. You are looking for Angel Arioldo. You do not speak Spanish.

The five actors talked briefly among themselves and then acted out a scene in which two immigration officers came to an apartment building looking for "illegal aliens." Prior to the role play, the class had participated in workshops and read material regarding their legal rights as immigrants. They brought this information and their shared experience into the role play. After the scene was enacted, other class members discussed their responses to the situation and the group continued to analyze and strategize effective ways of dealing with a threatening situation. The issues being discussed were highly compelling, and the "theater" format engaged people's attention in ways that straight reading, writing , and discussion activities hadn't.

Immigration is an ongoing topic in Ana's class, as it is in many ESL classes. The group has continued to address a myriad of related issues as they emerge, through a combination of reading, writing, reflection, and action.



A Lesson on AIDS

Sarah Boyer

INTRODUCTION

Discussion of AIDS was prevalent in the class and occurred on an informal basis at least once a week. As many misconceptions were floating around, and there was and is lots of misinformation about this disease, I decided to get some factual information from the AIDS Action Committee in Boston and compare it to student answers to an AIDS questionnaire I devised. I believed this was a worthwhile lesson to both disseminate information and to validate students' knowledge already acquired.

We read the questionnaire as a group and discussed which statements were true and false. I noted the statements where there was disagreement so we could discuss them further.

We read different parts in the brochure that dealt with each statement. We started with comparing the statement of God punishing gay people with the scientific evidence related to AIDS. Homophobia came out in the class discussion. I brought up the ways in which different groups of people are discriminated against in our society because they are different in some way from the "white middle class norm".

We talked about what facts are and what opinions are and where they come from.

We discussed all the statements where there was disagreement and read information in the brochures to find out what was true/not true in the statements.

I wrote the definitions of fact and opinion on the board with help from the students.

fact: the truth;
thing known to be true.

opinion: what one thinks;
beliefs;
judgments.

Then I asked people which of the statements on the questionnaire were facts and which were opinions. We also talked about opinions based on fact and opinions based on prejudice.

The last part of the lesson was a discussion of safe sex and reading about what was safe, risky and dangerous.

The lesson was well organized and the response was excellent. Discrimination between fact and opinion was discussed. Much information was shared among students and there was a lot of new information.

Students participated actively in the explicit discussion of safe sex because the class had been close and trusted one another. In addition, everyone realized how important this information was to protecting the health of their families and themselves.

AIDS Questionnaire

Which of these statements is true?
Which of these statements is false?
Circle your answer.

1. AIDS is a disease created by God to punish gay people.

   True False

2. You can get AIDS by swallowing someone's tears.

   True False

3. Anyone exposed to the AIDS virus will get AIDS.

   True False

4. If you tell your kids about AIDS and safe sex, you are encouraging them to have sex.

   True False

5. They should not advertise condoms on TV because it will offend too many people.

   True False

6. AIDS is spread by sexual contact, sharing needles, or through blood transfusions.

   True False

7. People living in the same house with a person who has AIDS will get AIDS.

   True False

8. A child can easily get AIDS from kids at school who have AIDS.

   True False

9. There is no treatment for AIDS today.

   True False

10. There is no cure for AIDS today.

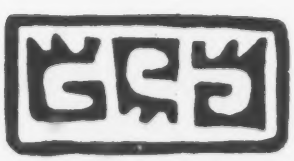
    True False

11. AIDS can be prevented.

    True False

12. Safe sex stops the risk of AIDS.

    True False



AIDS Awareness Month at Mujeres Unidas

Cathy Anderson

The following pages include a few examples of the materials developed by teachers during the month of AIDS Awareness. Our participatory style of education involves using class discussion as the catalyst for work in literacy. The AIDS workshops provided stimulating observations, debates, and questions which were explored through further readings, dramas, and language exercises.

Four teachers (3 ESL and 1 Spanish Literacy) designed this plan to accompany the workshops.

AIDS AWARENESS MONTH AT MUJERES UNIDAS
March Classroom Activities

We started off in the last week in February by collecting students' thoughts and questions regarding AIDS. We incorporated the Friday workshops into the classroom activities. Our schedule emerged as this:

Last week of February:
A. What thoughts, questions?

First week of March:
B. Group (whole school) activity with statements* around myths and origins.

Students from three sections were asked to come together. They were to listen to statements (in Spanish) and respond by moving to appropriate corners in the room marked "Agree", "Disagree" or "Not Sure". Each group gathered at their response sign would have to state why they chose that particular response. Statements:

1.) AIDS is growing faster in the Black and Latino communities than in the Gay community.
2.) Giving needles out free will only increase people's drug problems.
3.) People who get AIDS are dirty.
4.) Gay people brought AIDS to this country.
5.) You can get AIDS from drinking out of the same water fountain as a person with AIDS.
6.) If you have been with the same person for many years you are safe.
7.) If you are a straight woman and you use a condom you are safe.
8.) Lesbians can't get AIDS.

Responses from the discussion that followed provided material for classroom problem posing activities. Some of these follow in this collection.

2nd week: Continue work with dialogues, questions from Friday workshop presentations. Prepare students for the video coming next time: Ojos que no Ven.

3rd week: Re-evaluation to chart next step.

4th week: Talk about possible action students could take with the information they have. Plan for Friday activities.

5th week: Plan for popular theater presentations.

---

* Nancy Aronoff, a teacher at Mujeres Unidas, developed the statements.

March: A.I.D.S. Educational Month

Mujeres Unidas / Roxbury Comprehensive Health Center

FORUMS

Date: Friday, March 4, 1988
Time: 10:00 - 12:00
Title: A.I.D.S. & Latino Culture/ Socrates Francis, M.D.

Video Presentation: "Ojos que no ven"/ Iris Garcia, A.L.A.S.

Date: Friday, March 11, 1988
Time: 10:00 - 12:00
Title: Immune System / Miriam Pons, M.D. & M.U.A. student
A.I.D.S. Transmission, Diagnosis, Prevention/ Craig Andrade, R.N.

Date: Friday, March 18, 1988
Time: 10:00 - 12:00
Title: AZT, Use and Results / Harrison Faber, M.D., Boston City Hospital

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Date: Tuesday, March 8, 1988
Time: 10:00 - 1:00
Title: Safer Sex, Hot-lines, resources available for the Latino Community / Vicky Nunez, Fenway Community Health Center

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Rachel Martin, along with Mujeres' teaching staff has coordinated the curriculum for March: A.I.D.S. Educational Month.

Outreach and Publicity: Argentina Cueva
Coordinators: Eva Young/Socrates Francis

Students dictated their interpretation of the discussion of the first day of our AIDS Awareness workshops. The grammar exercise which follows was introduced the next day after students could re-read what they had dictated.

AIDS Discussion

Yesterday we spoke about AIDS. Mari asked what we thought about AIDS. Each person gave a different opinion. She asked if AIDS is more common in the Black, Latino and white communities than in the gay community. She asked if you could get the virus if you drink from the same fountain as an infected person. She asked for our opinion about giving out needles free to drug addicts. She asked for our opinion on whether more women or men have AIDS.

We also discussed the issue of clean needles for drug addicts. Eugenia said that a drug addict has one problem already: drugs. He or she doesn't need the problem of AIDS. Maria said that a clean needle program is too late. She also said that the government doesn't really care about drug addicts or AIDS patients. They don't want to spend the money for treatment. The government wants to turn its back and let people die.

Norma told us a very sad story about her cousin. Her cousin is married to a drug addict. They have four children. Norma's cousin, the mother, is only in her twenties. The father is young, too. Recently, the father has been very sick - high fever, and rash. He knows he has AIDS, but he is afraid to go to the hospital. Norma's cousin also knows that she tests positive for the AIDS antibody, but she is afraid too. Norma feels very sad about this. She also feels that if her cousin's husband had used a clean needle, he would not be sick and her cousin would not have the AIDS antibody.

USING IF

1.) If the government gives out clean needles, there will be more drug abuse.

2.) If the government gives out clean needles, AIDS will not infect so many people.

3.) If a woman uses a condom and non-oxynol jelly with a man, she will be fairly safe from AIDS.

4.) If we educate our children about AIDS, they will have more protection.

5.) If we don't talk to our lovers about our concerns, we could catch AIDS.

Ojos Que No Ven

Students who saw this video were very impressed by the story of various characters who are touched in some way by AIDS. Much discussion followed involving the issues the movie suggested regarding homosexuality. One character particularly caught the attention of the class: a young man who was caught by his mother while he was kissing his boyfriend. The mother was very hurt at first, but once she spoke with her counselor, she tried to accept her son. The son plays a key figure in the video because he works as an AIDS counselor, relating information about AIDS and encouraging open discussion. Another character who impressed the class was a man who was afraid to tell his wife that his male lover was infected with the AIDS virus. The following includes discussion around these two characters and the conflicts their roles introduce.

What should a woman do if she discovers her husband is sleeping with a man?

1. She should throw him out. This is wrong. The Bible says it is wrong, Romans 11:34.

2. She should ask him to give up the man, and if he won't, leave him.

After a bit of thinking and discussion of what is wrong with homosexuality, the decision of the class began to change. One woman said, "I've lived with my husband for 22 years and I love him. I couldn't just throw him out." Then someone else mentioned that they had friends who were homosexuals, and that they were good people, too. The decision began to be phrased like: ask him to give up the other man, talk to him, and help him. If he can't, you might leave. You have to use a condom if you are with him.

Discussion about Movie: Ojos que no Ven . . .

A woman in the class who had trouble saying the word condom re-told the story of the movie very carefully. When she finished she said one of the main things she liked about it was the advice of the counselor who said that a gay person should never be rejected by the family; this only makes them sad. She was the woman who was quoting the Bible earlier the week before.

A story developed in response to discussion about conflicts around homosexuality in the family:

Luisa has a cousin who is gay. He is thirty years old. He came out when he was 21 years old to his family. His family is very traditional. They thought he was going to get married. They hope he changes his mind. They think he is not normal. Luisa feels very bad. She is close to her cousin. They are the same age. When he told her she was surprised. She likes him a lot. She is confused. On the one hand, she knows he is like any of her other friends. He works, he likes to read, he likes to go dancing. On the other hand, he likes to be with men and not women. That is strange to her. Her parents think he is crazy. They say he should see a psychiatrist. Luisa is not sure. She loves her cousin very much. She thinks maybe her parents are not open minded. She decided to ask other people about gays and maybe read about it before she makes a judgement.

VOCABULARY

came out
thought
was
told
on the one hand, on the other hand
strange
should
open minded
judgement

How does Luisa's family respond to his being gay?

What does Luisa think?

Why is she confused?

What do Luisa's parents think?

What does Luisa decide to do in the end?

This comes out of the first week of group activity- using the statements as catalysts.

Carmen and Ramon

In this dialog, Carmen wants to talk to her husband Ramon about safe sex. She thinks he might be using I.V. drugs. She is worried. Here is what happens:

Carmen: I want to talk to you. I'd like to ask you if you're using drugs.

Ramon: No! Why do you say that? Are you crazy? I don't use drugs. Why are you asking? Did you see something?

Carmen: When we make love, you won't let me see your body. Where's the money you are supposed to be making?

Ramon: That's none of your business.

Carmen: Yes, it is my business. I'm your wife. I have the right to know.

Ramon then starts to hit Carmen. She calls the police and says, "My husband is beating me." When the police come, she asks them to take him away.

Class Response

Some people in the class thought that now Ramon would listen to Carmen because she means business. Others thought that he wouldn't change, that he would just hit her again. Someone in the class suggested that perhaps Carmen should bring up the topic of AIDS and safe sex indirectly by talking about an article or movie she saw. He won't feel attacked that way. Someone else mentioned that she tried to talk about it with her husband, but he wouldn't listen.

1.) Is there someone in your family you would like to talk with about AIDS? Husband? Brother? Daughter? Son?

2.) What do you want to tell them?

One student's response:

1. I would talk about AIDS to my husband and all my family because that is important for all my family.

2. I would tell everything about AIDS.

Drama for the AIDS Awareness month: All the classes at Mujeres Unidas presented dramas students created in order to communicate what they learned during the AIDS workshops. The following is the script from the Level 4 class. The class developed the characters and lines using improvisation and role playing as they went along. They wanted to avoid an artificial happy ending and really portray the difficulty of talking about AIDS. Therefore, the sister is discouraged by her attempts to talk with her sister, yet at the same time, she is supported by her good friend who encourages her to keep trying.

MY SISTER

Yolanda: A mature, responsible woman who lives with her younger sister. Yolanda is a little conservative and cautious.

Geno: A young woman who works in the bank and studies in college. She has lots of boyfriends and is very carefree.

Zenaida: A woman who attends Mujeres Unidas with Yolanda. She is a gossiper who lives next door.

I.

Y: Where are you going so early?

Z: I want to talk to you about your sister. Last night she came home late.

Y: I know that. Everyone knows that.

Z: I saw her because my baby woke up at 3 o'clock. She came in with a man. Different from last week.

Y: Who was it? Did you see the color of his car? Did you see him?

Z: Last week it was a white man. The other was a dark-skinned man. Be careful with your sister. Talk to her about AIDS. Remember what we learned at MUA.

II.

Z: Did you talk with your sister yet?

Y: I'm trying to, but she doesn't want to listen. She doesn't care that much. She doesn't want to talk. I don't know what else to do.

Z: You should not give up. You should keep on trying. Remember: we are the communicators in our community. Information is the only weapon we have against AIDS.

III.

G: Could I get a cup of coffee?

Y: Yes, go ahead.

G: I came in so late. I'm tired.

Y: Yes, I know. Where were you last night?

G: I went dancing. I went out with friends. Then we went around.

Y: I am worried about the style of life you are living.

G: It's my life. I live it the way I want to. I'm old enough.

Y: OK. It's your life. You can live it the way you want. But do you know how to protect yourself from AIDS?

G: What makes you think I'm going to catch AIDS? That disease is only for gay people.

Y: You are wrong. The reality is that in our community anyone could be in danger of catching AIDS.

G: What are you saying? That I'm a prostitute?

Y: Let me ask you a question. Do you know anything about the lives of the men you are going out with?

G: All I know is that they have money. I can have fun with them, go to expensive places with them.

Y: The important thing is not the money, or the cars, or the glamour. The important thing is your life.

G: O.K. I'll think about it. I have to go to work.

Inspired by the workshop!

HABLAR MUCHO MAS DEL SIDA

Aqui en Mujeres Unidas
siempre tenemos un tema
y este mes aun nos queda
hablar mucho mas del sida

Es un tema sobre la vida
y es una gran preocupacion
y estamos en union
aprendiendo sobre el sida

Escucha amiga mia
este problema del monton
mas si usas un condon
mas facil sera tu vida

Esto es una proteccion
para ti y tu companero
pues tu vida es lo primero
y de eso no hay discusion

Los adictos por la inyeccion
acortan mas sus vidas
con el problema del sida
para ellos no hay solucion

Un poco de comprension
y saber como hablarles
podria ser la base
para dejar la adiccion

Es una problema de todos
busca mas informacion
asi tendras mas nocion
no tendras la mente ida
y recuerda que del sida
prevencion es la solucion

POEMA ESCRITO POR GENOVEVA GALARZA
Aluma de nivel 4

TALKING ABOUT AIDS

Here at Mujeres Unidas
we always have a theme
and this month we still
have a lot to say about AIDS

It's a theme about life
and it's a great concern
so we are united
learning about AIDS

Listen my friend
about this problem for many
if you use a condom
the easier your life will be

This is a protection
for you and your partner
your life is what's important
and about that, there is no question

Drug addicts, by using IVs
shorten their lives more--
with the problem of AIDS
for them there is no solution

A little understanding
and knowing how to talk with them
could be the beginning
for them to overcome addiction

This is a problem for all of us
Look for more information
that way you'll have the knowledge
and you won't forget
Remember that with AIDS
prevention is the solution

Genoveva Galarza
copyright Genoveva Galarza, 1988.

Mujeres Unidas en Accion is an education and support center for Latina women in Dorchester, Mass. The women were involved in an in-depth study of AIDS during the month of March. Genoveva Galarza, a student at Mujeres Unidas, wrote this poem based on the stimulating classroom conversations, and presentations which were made to students by community activists involved in AIDS work. Mujeres Unidas is one of the many Latino organizations in Boston taking an active role in educating the Spanish speaking community about AIDS.

"Here Is a Problem and We Need to Do Something About It": Thoughts on Counseling and Critical Thinking

Ana Zambrano with Barbara Neumann

When I talk with English speaking people I say, "I am a counselor", but I don't say that in the classroom... I don't think the concept is really understood in each and every culture... I worked for three years with let's say thirty women with one hundred children. I was Ana and I was the one who screamed and yelled at the milk company because they cut our supply of milk after they had said they would give it to us for one year... things like that. But I was never called a counselor. And yet speaking in those terms, that's what I did.

-- Ana Zambrano

In Ana's ESL class of immigrant women and men, counseling is part of everybody's work. The teacher's job is to create a context where that is possible. She helps people to shed labels and to re-think their assumptions about classrooms. "I myself hate labels," she says, "I ask to be called Ana, not Senora or teacher. Most of the issues we have studied--welfare, family, immigration, language--came up outside the classroom. What I have done in the classroom is keep my ears open, and my eyes open, and my mouth shut... What I have tried to do is take my understanding from outside the classroom and help people introduce their questions or problems in class."

Often adult students will confide their problems in a teacher they consider to be a friend, but it is more difficult to bring problems to a group. Teachers have a counseling role to play in helping individuals enter into a group discussion of difficult issues. Ana makes several points regarding this process:

* Knowing <u>who the students are</u> is crucial in approaching problems in a group, so that contributions can come from all participants, and the issues can be addressed in terms that are clear to everyone.

* Informal networks should be recognized and respected. Problems are often addressed more effectively through people drawing upon their own neighborhood, family, and community resources than through attempts to access institutionalized "services."

* The process for analyzing and addressing the problem is very important. Two key elements are:

  -- Presenting the situation to the group.
  -- People in the group responding with practical advice.

The teacher's role is key in helping this happen: timing the introduction of an issue, being aware of how the individual's problem relates to the experiences of other group members, and connecting elements of "critical thinking" with the study of language and grammar.

For example, a woman came first to Ana and then to the class with the problem of needing housing and child care. Questions were developed by the class in response to her presentation of the issue: Where to go? Who to call? Ana introduced a reading which she composed: I live in Allston. I thought it would be so easy living here... Grammar points were introduced as people responded with practical advice: "If I need child care, I would go to APAC."

The woman got something from the whole class, because everybody brought something. This was one of the best outcomes for several reasons:

  -- Discussion could happen.
  -- The woman was willing to talk in class and share information.
  -- Solutions emerged from the group.
  -- Trust existed among the people in the group.

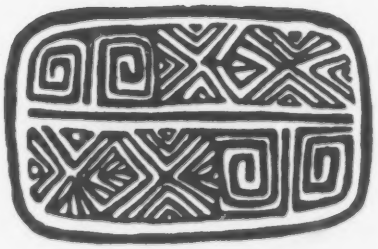
Ana introduces group problem-solving, mutual support, and critical thinking in her beginning level classes by simplifying the language used in the discussion (and using the first language of students at times) but not by oversimplifying the issues.

For example, in her Beginner class there is a man who needs work. In Spanish, Ana says, "This guy needs work." Then she creates a very short reading: This is Jose. He is from Brazil. He likes to work as a painter. Then students are asked to relate Jose's situation to their own:

I am _____.
I am from _____.
I need _____.

Critical thinking in relation to counseling can be defined as "putting yourself in someone else's shoes." In a multicultural situation such as the community school where Ana teaches, "putting yourself in someone else's shoes" might mean transcending very great cultural and linguistic differences. The conditions to be nurtured in the class so this can happen: Self-esteem. Respect.

Ana stresses that people don't come to see a counselor unless they have identified a problem. This isn't necessarily how people view their lives. A caring teacher/counselor helps people recognize "critical situations": those times when sharing and strategizing with other people can bring about change. It is a matter of thinking, learning, and feeling with others, not setting an agenda for them to follow. "People have their own view of things. You can either build on that or destroy it. Not by what you teach, but how you teach."



Assessing Spanish Literacy

Rosario Gomez

When discussing initial assessments, the direct relation between views on literacy and assessment needs to be acknowledged. Therefore, literacy needs to be defined. Literacy is an act of rediscovering one's world. This rediscovering is a process of critically thinking of the world around us. Critical thinking in the rediscovering process is for the adult practitioner a continuous reassessment of his/her own practice.

A part of reassessing my own practice was a reconsideration of the initial assessment of adult learners. Mujeres Unidas, my job site, needed an initial assessment for the literacy program which was being started. This program was in the students' first language, which was Spanish. I took a look at the different materials available, and most contained questions like the following: "Conteste las siguientes preguntas/ (Answer the following questions)
a.) Cual es el antonimo de "alto"? / What is the antonym of "high"?
b.) Cual es el homonimo de cometa? / What is the homonym of "kite"?

These questions search for knowledge of terminology. There were others that sought for specific data such as the year that some event occurred. None of which was what I was looking for.

An initial assessment has to demonstrate sensitivity, awareness and understanding of the adult learner and his or her culture. Questions involving terminology do not show sensitivity or respect towards the adult learner because they appear to be testing them on terminology which they are unfamiliar with. In the case of Mujeres' assessment, we also needed an assessment which reflected an awareness of the linguistic diversity within the Latino culture. What is a cometa (kite) in one place is a volantin in another and a barrilete in yet another. The understanding of the learning process of the adult learner would not be reflected in questions requiring terminology or specific data.

The initial assessment at Mujeres Unidas is generally introduced by the practictioner. She briefly introduces the materials to the student and gives the directions. The student then remains alone in a separate room. The directions appear written on the assessment sheet. The results of the assessment are based on how comfortable the student feels with reading and writing. Comfort is measured by the amount of writing and/or critical thinking, analysis, synthesis. The math assessment has two parts: word problems and arithmetic operations. Problem-solving ability is a criteria for the word problems. The arithmetic operations represent the standard mathematical forms. Familiarity with these forms is what is being assessed.

Reassessing this initial assessment brought me to make some modifications in the conducting of the assessment. The practitioner, instead of leaving the room after giving directions, should remain in the room and present the pictures first orally. This oral introduction can encourage the adult learner to write more. In math, the word problems need also to be presented first orally. This can encourage the learner to write the answers as opposed to saying them verbally.

Mujeres Unidas en Acción
1534 Dorchester Avenue,
Dorchester MA. 02122

Women United in Action, Inc.
Tel. (617) 265-3015

PRUEBA DIAGNOSTICA
DE LENGUAJE

NOMBRE: _____
FECHA: _____

DIRECCIONES: Intenta solucionar los siguientes problemas. No te sientas incomoda si no puedes contestar a todos. Intenta los que te parezcan mas faciles. Haz todo tu trabajo en estos papeles.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Parte 1.-

Conteste a las siguientes preguntas referentes a la fotografía.

1.- ¿Donde esta el muchacho .?

¿Qué hace él ahí?

2.-¿Conoce Ud esos santos?

¿Porqué están ahí?

3.-¿Tiene Ud santos en su casa?

¿Por qué?

Parte 2.-

Escribe una carta a una buena amiga tuya contándole que vuelves a la escuela.

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PRUEBA DE DIAGNOSTICA
DE MATEMATICAS

NOMBRE: _____
FECHA: _____

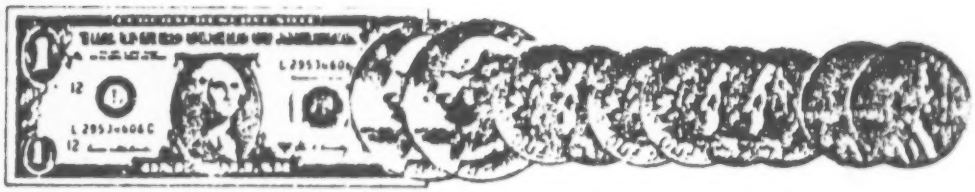
DIRECCIONES: Resuelve todos los problemas que puedas. NO te sientas incomoda si no puedes contestar a todos. Haz todo tu trabajo en estos papeles.

1.

$1.16

2.

$____

3. 

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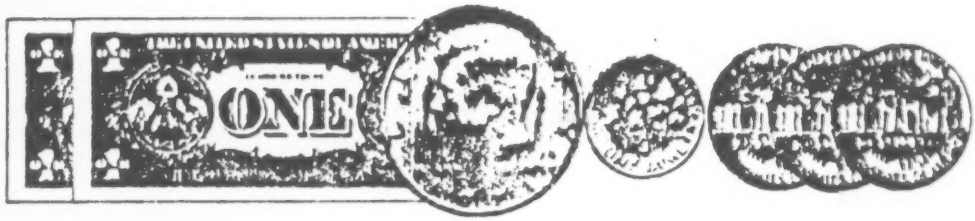
4. 

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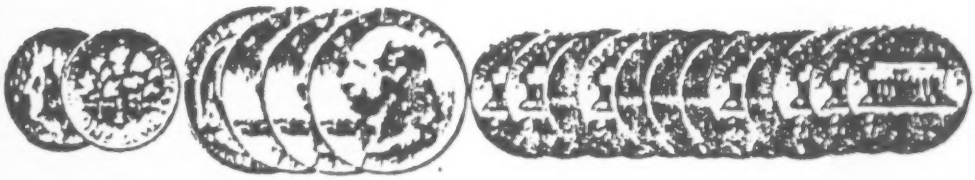
5. 

$____

6.

$____

Escriba al lado de $ la cantidad de dinero que hay en cada linea.

1.- Rosa fue de compras al supermercado. Compró $3.74 de jamón, $5.43 de pollo y $4.35 de puerco¿Cuanto gastó Rosa en total? Ella pagó con un billete de $20. ¿Cuanto recibirá Rosa de vuelto?

2.- Ericka y Luis tienen 3 juguetes en la escuela. La mamá les trae 5 más. ¿Cuántos juguetes tienen Ericka y Luis ahora?

3.- Hay 300 cuadernos en la librería. 57 estudiantes toman cuadernos. ¿Cuántos cuadernos quedan en la librería?

4.- Tenía 150. Tuve que comprar lentes. Cuestan $107. ¿Cuánto me queda?

Interviews with Frances Wright and Marie Thompson of WEAVE

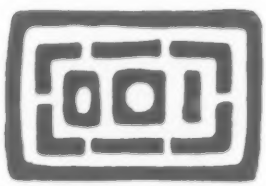
BUILDING CRITICAL THINKING, COMMUNITY PRIDE AND IDENTITY

Barbara E. Neumann

Frances Wright worked at WEAVE for two and a half years, as a teacher and as education director.

Marie Thompson graduated from WEAVE and received her high school diploma in 1987.

The interviews which follow are about participation in a program for women, strongly rooted in the Black community--what that means for the development of critical thinking as an educational priority, and how critical thinking is interpreted, taught, learned, practiced.



INTERVIEW WITH FRANCES WRIGHT

Frances: WEAVE to me represented all the things that I thought women should be about. And coming there I saw that there must have been--Oh I guess there must have been 100 women running around--all looking forward to this dream... All wanted to get a high school diploma, all wanted to get a job... And we had promised them all a space. I was part of that, I was part of trying to make that happen.

There were three teachers, there was a counselor, there was an advocate. All of us taking what we had and trying to fulfill the dream we had...

Barbara: How did being a program for Black women shape what went on?

F: I think that in the beginning they saw the need for women to have a place to go to learn, to deal with issues apart from men. What I saw from the curriculum that was there before I came and certainly after I came, was that things were leaned towards women's issues... We noticed during the assessment that women expected certain things from WEAVE, so that the word was out. You know, you can go here, talk about women's issues and not be afraid, you can get a support group that will help you through a lot of issues and problems... In fact when I first came there I knew it was for women but I didn't know the intensity-- I was really taken by the emotions that a lot of women had and that they felt towards one another... There were some students there who had been there for a couple of years. Their perceptions of it were just overwhelming for me... They would just start off talking about different issues and there was tears... and I had never seen this before, I had really never seen this before. The director got involved-- it was overwhelming to me, really. I had never been in a situation where women of different backgrounds-- and certainly there was quite a diversity there-- all had the same issues, and nobody got down on anybody.. Women were allowed to cry-- it was therapeutic, to have a place like this they could come to... It was hard to leave there. We found that when women were getting towards leaving they had a hard time. Most places it's like okay, I've got my High School diploma, I'm ready to go... But we find that when they're about to make that initial step there was a lot of pullback for the students, and we could never figure it out. But basically, I think it's because they really did not want to leave there-- I think they felt that people cared there, they had friends, they could go to anyone there if they had an issue. And if I, as head teacher at the time, could not address it there was the executive director who did not mind sitting down and talking with a student... It's that kind of place.

B: Does it change women's ways of thinking about issues? How?

F: I think an environment was created which enabled women to say what they wanted to say, they didn't feel threatened, they weren't looked down on, and regardless of how they said it, it wasn't looked down on. There was that feeling that others understood what you were saying. I think what it did was give women a sense of empowerment, because they had no problem once they found out that they had someone they could share their concerns with. They'd say, what can we do about it? What are we going to do about it? And that was good. You know you've got a friend, someone can help you, you can do anything. You aren't out there by yourself, you feel like you can make changes. And I think that WEAVE was that type of environment where women could discuss these issues and there was always someone there.

We'd bring people in to talk with the women, about welfare, about whatever. Women hear things, and they feel like when they go up to the welfare office they're being intimidated... but when someone from the welfare office would come and talk with them at WEAVE they felt like they could ask them questions, they weren't afraid, and that experience changed them...

B: What you're describing sounds very different from the school of thought which equates critical thinking with logic. There are whole programs developed which attempt to teach people "how to think critically" by following a series of problem solving steps. It's very linear. I hear you describing something that to me sounds very different than that, something that values emotion as a part of problem-solving whereas this other notion is to keep emotion out of it as much as possible, to distance yourself from it and be "objective".

F: These women have issues that you have to deal with and you can't just ask them to...

B: Follow the five step method of problem-solving?

F: Right. There were women who would come in and sit there and wouldn't say anything at all. It wasn't so much that they were shy, it was that they were put down so much, I felt, that they stopped opening their mouths. And you'd get a woman who would say come on, come on and join in and they would start talking and things that would come out of them about their experiences were just unbelievable...

Women would say things to each other, and listen, and have time to think through issues. Get more information, be allowed to think and talk and work together on something.

I've learned a lot being there. It's unbelievable -- I went in there with a perception of I'm going to teach this way, or I'm going to teach that way... Like anyone else, I had expectations... I thought we'd deal with some Black issues, I thought we'd read some Black writers... but the women turned me around, they had issues they knew they wanted to deal with... It was hard.

B: What do you think of the focus on "problem-solving" in adult literacy programs? Do you ever feel that problems are overemphasized, at the expense of developing people's creativity and curiosity?

F: It's very hard. The women have problems such as lack of housing, transportation, day care, whatever. I find that nothing gets done until those things are answered. Regardless. So I think the focus has to be on teaching skills or giving resources so that they can deal with their issues. That's why they're there. And I think that's why a lot of them dropped out of school, because those issues had never been addressed. So I think you have to set in motion a process from day one that says these issues will be addressed. Once they know that... they start to see working on these issues is part of their education, not something separate from it.

Sometimes a woman will come in with a problem that will overwhelm the whole class. You have to be sensitive to that, be prepared to deal with it.

B: What is your vision of WEAVE's future?

F: Oh goodness. I'd like to see all the women who graduate and get their GED at some point come back and be teachers. That would revolutionize the program, the women's education. It really would. I think it's better to be taught by somebody who's lived through the same issues. I'd like to see all the services that the women need -- like day care, transportation -- actually provided, in the community. I'd like to see the community setting its own agenda and addressing it.

INTERVIEW WITH MARIE THOMPSON

Barbara: How did you decide to go back to school?

Marie: Mainly because of my fifteen year old. She started asking me questions. About, "Ma, if I dropped out of school..." It got me thinking after she said that. I thought, well, I'm a high school drop-out. Maybe if I go back and graduate that would push her on to graduate, get that dropping out thought out of her mind, if that's the reason she was asking me the question.

It took a while after that 'cause I was scared they were gonna say "well this is a dumb lady" because I hadn't been going to school for 14 or 15 years... I thought maybe I might of forgot a lot of things. My comprehension was going and I was having to read something two or three times before I understood it or remembered what I read, so I was saying maybe it would do some good, 'cause I like to read, but then I don't like to read... I like to read because that's where your knowledge comes in and I didn't like to read because it took so long to read, so I'd rather watch a movie about a book or a story...

After I went back to school and got a brush up on things like drawing inferences, getting the main idea, or the main subject, remembering characters, and those kinds of things, reading became fun again.

So not only do I think it helped my fifteen year old, but but my ten year old had a problem in reading 'cause I guess she didn't see me reading so I guess she figured, well Ma doesn't read so I guess I don't have to read. So now when she sees me reading she picks up one of the encyclopedia books we have there or she picks up the Bible and her marks have gone up. She's gotten a T-shirt this year for the most improved reader. And it makes me feel good because we are the kids' role models. Like you don't realize it, but what you do affects your kids. If for instance you don't sit down and read or read to your kids they're not gonna do it. If you don't get up and do your chores they're not gonna do it.

Just like anything else. It's changed the whole household. Even the five year old, he's brought home a little picture book that he made and he can tell you a story to go along with the pictures. Now that's change here, in terms of family life.

Now as far as me, I know now that I can get up and be somewhere every day at nine o'clock rather than opposed to staying at home, sitting here getting fat. You get lazy and then you sort of lose it all so now I know that in the future there is a part for me in the world outside home.

Exactly what it is at this time I don't know but I know there's something out there for me to do. I'd like to teach, but I don't know if teaching just came because I went back to school as an adult and figured, well, this is fine for me. So what I'm going to do now is explore, to discover, so to speak, and see if I really want to teach and then go to school and get a teaching certificate and then later decide it isn't what I want to do. Whether it's to work in a bank or a hospital, doing some work out there will help me decide what I want to do out there.

B: How did you decide to go to WEAVE -- why that particular program?

M: It's funny. I was watching "The Price is Right" and a commercial came on about WEAVE and I got the number and I said let me call it. I spoke to Frances Wright and she explained WEAVE to me. I had never tried to go back to school... well I had gone back to get a GED, but a GED wasn't enough for me, mainly because it was only a two or three night a week class, and you sort of "brushed up" on certain subjects, whether you understood them or not. I felt like I had to go from the beginning, you know, to get the basics...

Of course, I knew how to add, subtract, that sort of thing, 'cause I do it every day when I handle money, but I needed more. Let's say for instance I wanted to lay a carpet in my house, and I didn't want to pay someone to do it for me, I could go to school and learn about areas, perimeters, those kinds of things. Like I said, I needed the basics. So when I did go to school I learned those things, so now I can lay a carpet or I could measure a room, or whatever.

But I didn't just learn practical things, it gave me a new look at me, too. It made me see that I am somebody, that I can fit into the working world, that I don't have to be sitting out on the side because I don't have a high school diploma or work for minimum wage. I can now communicate with people out there. I can, just like I said, be somebody.

I don't know if you can understand or if you can identify.

But you probably can sympathize or feel what someone who's dropped out of high school or gone on Welfare or General Relief feels. It's funny, 'cause we don't talk about it really in this society; the main talk is always money, money, money, they just mention education every now and then, but what's really done about it? You still have a high high school drop out rate. So what's being done about that?

I feel like the start is gonna be us-- and by us I mean I include myself because I was a high school drop-out. We look at our kids and we say, well this kid here he doesn't want to do this or he doesn't want to do that, but you've got to remember that this kid is looking at you, you're that child's example. And I don't mean my kids-- all kids are our kids.

It's the education projects that we need to get up-- more like WEAVE and WAITT. Talking to people, I've heard a lot of people say they want to go back to school-- they just don't know how to go back or where to go. I tried to get a GED, I tried at Jeremiah Burke, I tried at English High, and I just left 'cause it wasn't enough for me, it didn't give me the satisfaction that WEAVE gave me. At WEAVE we have role models, the teachers there are women too, so you're a woman you understand another woman's feelings so you could talk to them. I mean if, say for instance, if I had a bad morning before I got there I could talk to my teacher-- they're really into it-- and I'm not just praising WEAVE but you know that's just how they are... WEAVE is just beautiful...

What I like about WEAVE is you don't forget about it... like I call back to see how people are doing, to see if there's anything I can help--- like my best friend is still in class there and I'm always calling to tell her,"look you've got to get up and you've got to do it-- if you don't do it you're not gonna get it done." And somebody else is there this year now because I was their role model to follow... and so I'm proud of her. It's really good to know you're still working with WEAVE.

B: What attracts you to teaching?

M: Well, if you want to know the truth, it's sort of been in me all my life. When I was a kid I remember the end of the school year you get all those papers and books the teacher's not going to use the next year, they give to you. Sitting on the back porch with the neighborhood kids and teaching, me being the teacher. And then having my own children, I liked teaching them, showing them things. See, a teacher's like a leader and I liked being a leader. I love being a leader.

I think that because I'm outspoken and I know first hand what it's like to go back to school, it would be the perfect job for me. And I would like it to be adult literacy because

like I said, sometimes it's hard for people and they might have some of the thoughts I had. They might think "I'm dumb", you know, "I'm a welfare mother" or "I'm a high school drop out"-- you know the titles that they put on you. And it would be easier to relate to somebody else who's in that shoe. And that's what attracts me.

B: Are there people in your life who have been important teachers-- not necessarily teachers in school-- but people who have helped you see things in a new way?

M: My mom-- she was one of my first teachers. I guess you could say she was always an education nut-- in elementary or in junior high school if we didn't have homework there was all kinds of encyclopedias, books, Funk and Wagnall's-- the whole house was just a library-- we had to get some kind of book and do "homework" even when we didn't have homework. We would pick out things and do them at home that we wanted to take in for extra credit...So she was a big teacher for me too.

And then the pastor of the church I grew up in. I worked with the BTU which was the Baptist Training Union-- techniques of looking up and remembering scriptures, how to memorize-- different techniques.

B: Do you feel like when you went to WEAVE, what you studied was connected with the community around you?

M: Oh yes, definitely. I used to hate civics, politics. I was and I am a registered voter. But I used to go to the booth and pull the lever for the one whose name I'd heard... Now to vote-- it seems interesting. I know how to read about this character here or I can understand what I'm reading. I can understand what this person stands for, what this candidate is representing, as opposed to just hearing the name and going to pull the lever...

B: What kinds of issues did you talk about in class?

M: On Fridays we had speakers. But we didn't all the time have speakers, sometimes we had rap sessions. And say for instance "Sally" had a problem at home with one of her children, or say like her teenage son was getting into some trouble and say she really didn't know how to handle him or she didn't know which way to go about it, we could hear from "Jane", who's an older lady who has raised all her children, a technique, or ways to help her help him.

In other words, what I'm saying, speaking out our problems amongst other women gave us new ideas, gave us a new look on how to handle your child-- or what to do with your husband or your boyfriend, whoever was getting on your back. And those were really, really helpful because you knew you weren't the

only one who was going through those problems-- and sometimes as humans we have a tendency to forget that we're not the only one that's going through problems. And you can leave them in yourself and get bottled up. And that's when you quit.

But that's how we did it, we helped each other. We had different levels in classes, but all of us got together and helped each other, it didn't matter what level. Like maybe at lunchtime if we didn't go out we'd sit and work on a subject during lunch. Or help somebody with something-- it was nice, it was fun, that's what keeps them going too, they can look up to another student who may be a little higher than what they are and still get the help. Not all the time go to the teacher.

Some people don't all the time want to go to the teacher because either they feel like they're bugging the teacher too much or they're being a pest, or they don't want someone to think "well this is teacher's pet because she's always at the teacher's desk." But we could help each other.

That's one good thing too about being an adult in school. You don't have the problems of teenagers-- you don't have peer pressure like you do in high school. You have people wanting to help each other as well as themselves.

Also in terms of issues: I'd like to do more T.V. shows. [Marie appeared on the T.V. show "People Are Talking" as a participant on a panel discussing women and poverty.] I like to think of myself as an entertainer too. You see I write poetry, and I read and recite the poetry. Back in Takoma, Washington, where I was raised, when I was in high school it was during the Vietnamese War-- and on this army base we called Ft. Lewis Washington we used to do shows for soldiers who were spending their last night in the United States. And I used to do poetry and read and recite and from there I knew the more audience I had the better I was-- in other words, like a show-off! And I read and did poetry for the Elma Lewis School of Fine Arts. I like entertaining. My goal too even though I say I want to be a teacher, one of my idols is Oprah Winfrey-- I'd like maybe one day to have my own show.

B: Well, she's a kind of teacher... you don't necessarily have to be in a school to teach.

M: But I really want to work with students-- I want somebody to come to me and say "teacher". I want to be with people, I know I can't have a job where I'm not working with people, I know that. Even Oprah Winfrey-- if I was in her shoes, if I was like a commentator-- they're still working with people. But I'd like to teach-- you know, math, reading and writing.

B: You write quite a bit?

M: Oh yeah. Poetry mostly, yes. And say, short stories; I try to keep a journal and pack it so that maybe one day not to say publish it but maybe my kids when I'm gone they can read it and know what I was all about, or know what my feelings were, my thoughts were, those kinds of things, yeah.

B. Do you feel like your ways of thinking have changed as a result of your going back to school?

M: Most definitely. If I could say that, I think I'm more mature. I sort of like grew up while I was attending school. I don't know how I could put this-- you know your environment plays a big part in how you feel about yourself or a big part in what you do each day. And I sort of had this laid back thing.

I was set in my ways and didn't want to change. Like, this is the way it is and this is the way it's gonna be. That sort of attitude. Now the way I think is, well, I've accomplished this and if I want to be a teacher I can be a teacher. You know it's not like, well, that's the way it is, I'm not a teacher so... or I'm not a high school grad. So it's not gonna be that way. Or even again it has an effect on how I raise my kids or how I deal with my man-- or how I just deal with everyday people, period.

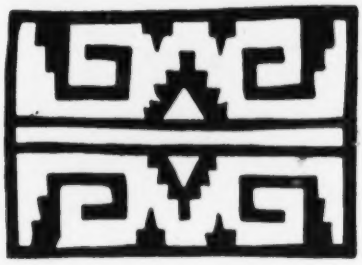
B: You described your friend who was really stuck and couldn't change, and how at one point you had a similar way of thinking-- what accounts for your changing?

M: Getting up, going to school every day. Having to plan a schedule or having to plan a period of time. Not just say ahead of time-- not just today, but tomorrow as well. Saying what I'm gonna do, sticking by it. Having the people (the teachers, again, at WEAVE)-- when I felt like quitting because things were getting heavy at home and when the kids wouldn't let me study-- having them say, look, you can do it. It's hard, I know it's gonna be hard, but you gotta do this-- you gotta plan this, you gotta do it like this-- you gotta take some time out for yourself. You're gonna study two hours a day, don't sit down at 5:00 and study til 7:00. Do an hour, take a break, and get up again when the kids are down, 8:00, 9:00 go back to it for another hour.

Just having them say that-- I mean, over, and over, and over, and over, and over... And eventually, it became a habit. Okay all the time it wasn't 5:00 that I was able to sit down and do it but I got it done, and I didn't have to go to a teacher and say, "look, I'm gonna have to quit, it's just getting too heavy"... I told myself I have to go the woman in the mirror who looked just like me, who doesn't give me any mouth, and say to her: "Look you know, let me tell you something, you're a beautiful person, you are somebody, you can get up there and you can do it."

She was making me see me. I was seeing the old me and then through her I was seeing her who was me, but a better me or a new one. Even now, I can still do that-- when I feel like oh, I'm lazy, I don't want to go look for this job, I don't want to go do it-- I can go to her and tell her and she's gonna tell me the same thing. I'm not gonna hear words, but I'm gonna read those lips. And she's gonna tell. And that's nice, it's really beautiful.

For Your Information: Resources Used in Developing the Critical Thinking Project



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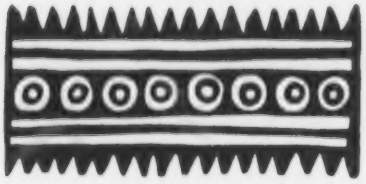

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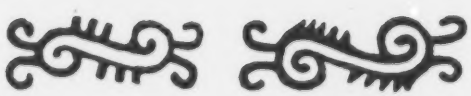

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